



FIELD UMPIRING

HANDBOOK



2026 Edition

Introduction

This handbook is designed to support learning and development. It contains information, references, pictures, and activities relevant to the AFL Umpiring disciplines of Field Umpiring, Boundary Umpiring and Goal Umpiring in School, Youth and Senior AFL Queensland competitions.

References to the Rules and Regulations of the game of AFL have been made throughout this handbook. Rules and Regulations change on a regular basis. In the future, if you need to refer to a Rule or Regulation, you should make sure you are using the current version.

AFL Queensland Umpiring Department Staff

Sam Bridges - Umpiring Development Lead QLD

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Responsible for Umpiring Department staff leadership, Incident referrals/investigations, umpiring department strategy, umpire coach structure and support and major projects.

Ainslie Gardner - Umpire Recruitment & Retention Lead QLD

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Responsible for developing state based strategies for recruitment and retention, overseeing women & girls, school umpire programs, club based initiatives and the development of future strategy.

Nicola Stevens - Umpiring Coordinator - Recruitment and Retention

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Responsible for developing state based strategies for recruitment and retention, overseeing women & girls, school umpire programs, club based initiatives and the development of future strategy.

Chloe Webb - Community Coordinator - Competitions and Pathways

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Responsible for delivery and coordination of SEQ Youth and SEQ Junior competitions (umpires and umpire coaches), mentor program and women and girls.

Paige Kakau - Administration Coordinator - Umpiring

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Responsible for umpiring payments (regional and SEQ), umpiring department finance, uniforms, communications, administration support and social media.

Expectations

We cannot deliver on our commitment to the Football Operations and Game Development teams without your support, however there are things as an Umpiring Department we need from all Umpires to commit to this season:

- **Match Day Paperwork** must be entered in OfficialsHQ every weekend. This is non-negotiable and is a requirement of your Umpiring role
- **Best on Ground votes** are another non-negotiable part of your Umpiring role. Not completing this step of the Match Day Paperwork can have major effects on the Player of the Year Awards in competitions across the state
- **Updated Availability:** We need to know when you are available to Umpire. Our desire is for your availability to be submitted 2 weeks in advance, so our Appointment Coordinators and Coaches can appoint you to games
- **Training Sessions:** It is imperative you attend as many sessions as possible – it is part of your development and demonstrates your commitment to Umpiring. As with any job, training is a key part of how you are educated – missing sessions is inhibiting your ability to manage matches better, make better decisions, and be fit enough to Umpire across the season.
- **Online Learning Modules:** there are mandatory education modules that you need to complete this year. Without completing these we will be unable to appoint you to games throughout the year. I have attached a how to guide from AFLQ that will outline how to access and complete these modules.

Field Umpire



Role of the Field Umpire

The field umpire (also known as a central umpire) is responsible for controlling general play and is positioned within the field of play. The field umpire is the only type of umpire permitted to award free kicks or initiate stoppages in play, and they execute ball ups to restart play.

Originally, only one field umpire was used; in 1976 a second field umpire was introduced in the Victorian Football League, in 1994 this was expanded to three field umpires in the AFL and in 2023 this was again expanded to four field umpires. Amateur, suburban, junior and semi-professional matches can be officiated by any number of one to four field umpires.

Responsibilities of an Umpire

- Introduce yourself to the coaches and teams
- Flip the coin at the start of the game with the captains
- Umpire the game fairly with impartiality
- Ensure the safety of players
- Pay all free kicks according to the laws of the game
- Finish the game and return the football to the club house

What should you be working on

It is vital you understand the rules of the game as they change from year to year and change between competitions (current rules matrix for modified junior games can be found on page 10). Ensure that you are constantly developing your communication skills and fitness to ensure you are in the best place to manage and officiate the game.

Training

Training for field umpires (youth and senior) is held at various venues throughout Queensland (SEQ and regionally). While training is not mandatory, umpires are strongly encouraged to attend regularly so they can practice their on field skills in a pressure free environment. Compulsory sessions will be held each month where all of the umpiring groups within the region will come together. If you would like more information regarding training details please reach out to Chloe or Nicola; their details can be found on page 2).

Appointment Expectations

Umpires are appointed each week to their games (league umpires) through OfficialsHQ. It is important that your availability is updated at least 2 weeks in advance - especially if you know you are going to be away so that appointments can be made accurately. If you play for a team within any AFLQ competition it is important that you have these details entered into OfficialsHQ so that you can be appointed to games that don't clash with when you are playing.

When appointments are made in OfficialsHQ you need to accept or decline early in the week. This provides AFLQ staff with enough time to reappoint to games when umpires are unable to attend (declined appointments).

On game day you will need to arrive at the ground an hour before your appointment, this allows time for you to warm up and be ready regardless of traffic or unexpected events.

Umpiring Checklist

- Umpiring Uniform: Clean and folded or neatly on a hanger
- Running shoes or boots + a spare set of laces (White)
- Minimum of 2 whistles
- White umpiring hat
- Drink bottle (filled up)
- Umpiring Handbook
- Copy of the Laws of the Game (downloaded as a PDF on your phone)
- Notepad and Pen
- Yellow, Red and White Cards
- Coin for toss with captains
- Sunscreen

Game Day Checklist

- White hat
- Sweatbands
- Whistle
- Bradnam's shirt
- Shorts
- Socks
- White boots/runners
- Red/white/yellow cards
- Notebook and pen
- Water bottle



Presentation: On Field

Umpires are to wear their AFLQ supplied uniform:

Mandatory:

- Green On-Field Shirt (Tucked In)
- Grey On-Field Shorts
- Green Socks (Pulled Up)
- Green Wrist Bands
- White On-Field Cap - optional

What to Expect: Match Day

it is important that you prepare appropriately for your game. You should be thinking about the following:

- Ensure that you are well rested; get a good nights sleep
- Ensure that you are well hydrated; this impacts both your physical and mental performance
- Ensure that you have fuelled appropriately the night before and morning of your game to ensure you have enough energy for your game or games

Before your Game

When you first arrive at the ground you will need to introduce yourself to your fellow umpiring team. As you are responsible for player safety during the game it is important that you ensure you are happy with the field and goal posts (clear from rubbish, post pads in place, lines clearly marked), if this is not the case you must communicate this with the Ground Marshall.

You will be required to introduce yourself to both teams and coaches before the game. This is when you will check that all players fingernails are short and smooth, their boots don't have metal studs in them and all jewellery has been removed or taped over. This also provides you with an opportunity to reinforce any expectations you have for the game that day with the players and coaches to minimise any misunderstandings.

You will need to walk onto the field 15 minutes prior to your game starting (when you're umpiring a gala day this may not be possible however you should be out there as early as possible to keep the day moving). You are required to complete the toss with the captains 2 minutes prior to the game starting.

Starting the Game

At the start of the game you will check that both teams are correctly positioned on the field following the 6/6/6 rule. Once teams are correctly positioned hold the ball above your head to signal to the timekeepers to sound the siren, blow your whistle and conduct the ball up. It is important that the rucks are able to contest the football so aim to throw the football twice the height of your rucks. Once you have thrown the football into the air back out quickly 15-20m while keeping your eyes on the contest so you don't miss any free kicks that may need to be awarded. Remember the ball can be cleared quickly so be ready to change direction and stay side on to the contest as you move down the field.

During the Game

When umpiring you need to ensure you are in the correct position to judge whether the tackle is legal, the ball has been disposed of correctly and whether a mark has been taken so you can accurately pay any free kicks. Try to maintain a 15-20m control distance from the contest and a side angle; if you cannot see the football you should skirt the pack until you can see it and the players in the immediate vicinity.

When a mark is taken you should blow your whistle loud enough for everyone to hear it; this includes players, coaches, spectators, timekeepers and anyone else who is at the game. When you are blowing your whistle to award a free kick you may need to trigger in to the contest quickly to ensure the game stays under control (e.g. following a push, late tackle or fight). Using your soft skills for game management such as strong hand signals, clear free kick control and a loud voice to talk to the players and explain what is happening will allow you to maintain this control easier.

When a player takes a mark within range to have a shot on goal it is important that you set this up correctly. Run in and stand behind the player on the mark and line up the player who is taking the kick to the centre of the goal line directly over the mark. Back out at 90 degrees to the player on the mark so you can accurately distinguish whether they have moved and you need to pay a 50m penalty.

When a goal or behind is scored you must signal to the goal umpire using the relevant hand signal - if there is no goal umpire turn and signal clearly to the score bench/match manager. It is important you move into position quickly to maximise game time, this may mean setting up the player on the mark after a behind or running back to the centre after a goal has been scored. Following a goal it may be easier to ask one of the players to collect the football and kick it back to the middle for you to

complete the ball up to restart play. If you are setting up a kick out after a behind make sure that the player taking the kick is positioned correctly inside the goal square; if they set up incorrectly blow your whistle and call them back to set the kick correctly.

If there is an injured player on the field your priority needs to be player safety. If the ball is down the other end of the ground you can allow play to continue; however, as soon as the play is within 20m of the injured player you must immediately raise one hand above your head and blow your whistle to stop the game. If the trainer is attending to the injured player and calls for a stretcher you must stop play immediately regardless of where the football is. If you are holding time while a player who is bleeding exits the field with a trainer the replacement player can come on straight away and get into position, however you cannot restart play until the bleeding player is off the field.

Ending the Quarter/Game

When the siren sounds you immediately blow your whistle loud enough for everyone to hear it and raise your hands above your head. If a player takes a mark prior to the siren sounding and is within a reasonable kicking distance for a shot on goal they are permitted to take this kick. Run in and stand behind the player on the mark and line up the player who is taking the kick to the centre of the goal line directly over the mark. Back out at 90 degrees to the player on the mark so you can accurately distinguish whether they have moved and you need to pay a 50m penalty. You also need to watch whether the player taking the kick moves off their line; if this is the case they are not permitted to take their shot. If the siren sounds before the player takes the mark you need to collect the football and stop them from having a shot on goal.

Umpire Abuse

There is a zero tolerance for umpire abuse in any situation. Umpire abuse may occur in many forms such as:

- Players continually not listening to you
- Players, coaches or spectators arguing about your decisions
- Any comment that is personal, targeted or crude

If this occurs during the game by a player you have a few options; you can award a free kick against that player, award a 50m penalty against the player, issue a yellow card or a red card. While this is the basic escalation process you have the ability to skip steps if the level of abuse warrants it. If the abuse is coming from a coach or someone within the coaches box you will follow the white card protocol (outlined further on page 12). If you issue a white card you need to communicate this with the Ground Marshall why it was issued at the break who will communicate this to the team manager.

Rules of the Game



Methods of Playing the Ball

There are only two legal methods of disposing the football in AFL; a handball or a kick. If any other method of disposal is used (such as a throw) a free kick should be awarded to the other team.

Marking the Football

A player is considered to have taken a mark when they catch the football after it has been kicked at least 15m within the playing surface and has not made contact with the ground or any other player. If any of these conditions are not met you need to call 'Play On' loud enough for everyone to hear and use the correct signal.

Modified Rules

MIXED UNDER 8 INTRODUCTORY	GIRLS UNDER 9 DEVELOPMENT	MIXED UNDER 9 & 10 DEVELOPMENT	GIRLS UNDER 11 DEVELOPMENT	MIXED UNDER 11 COMPETITION
<p>10 MINS</p> <p>GROUND SIZE 70m x 50m</p> <p>ZONES</p> <p>9-A-SIDE</p> <p>SCORING No scores, ladders or finals</p> <p>RESULTS No recording of best players or goal kickers. No individual player awards.</p>	<p>12 MINS</p> <p>GROUND SIZE 85 x 65m</p> <p>ZONES</p> <p>9-A-SIDE</p> <p>SCORING No scores, ladders or finals</p> <p>RESULTS No recording of best players or goal kickers. No individual player awards.</p>	<p>12 MINS</p> <p>GROUND SIZE 85 x 85m</p> <p>ZONES</p> <p>12-A-SIDE</p> <p>SCORING No scores, ladders or finals</p> <p>RESULTS No recording of best players or goal kickers. No individual player awards.</p>	<p>13 MINS</p> <p>GROUND SIZE 115 x 75m</p> <p>ZONES</p> <p>12-A-SIDE</p> <p>SCORING No scores, ladders or finals</p> <p>RESULTS No recording of best players or goal kickers. No individual player awards.</p>	<p>13 MINS</p> <p>GROUND SIZE 115 x 75m</p> <p>ZONES</p> <p>12-A-SIDE</p> <p>SCORING Controlling Bodies Decision</p> <p>RESULTS Controlling Bodies Decision</p>
<p>✗ No tackling or holding of an opponent. No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player. No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands. No shepherding.</p>	<p>✗ Holding of an opponent. No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player. No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands. No shepherding.</p>	<p>✗ Holding of an opponent. No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player. No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands. No shepherding.</p>	<p>✓ Full tackling and bumping Fending off, smothering, or barging Stealing the ball</p>	<p>✓ Full tackling and bumping Fending off, smothering, or barging Stealing the ball</p>
<p>BOUNCING THE BALL No bouncing permitted</p> <p>KICKING OFF GROUND Not permitted</p> <p>PLAYER ROTATION Every player must play a minimum of 50-75% game time with the controlling body determining the exact % of game time per player (excluding injured players).</p> <p>MARKING Any distance, reasonable attempt</p> <p>MERCY RULE</p> <p>COACH ON GROUND</p>	<p>MODIFIED TACKLING</p> <p>BOUNCING THE BALL 1 max</p> <p>KICKING OFF GROUND Not permitted</p> <p>PLAYER ROTATION Every player must play a minimum of 50-75% game time with the controlling body determining the exact % of game time per player (excluding injured players).</p> <p>MARKING Any distance, reasonable attempt</p> <p>MERCY RULE</p> <p>COACH ON GROUND</p>	<p>MODIFIED TACKLING</p> <p>BOUNCING THE BALL 1 max</p> <p>KICKING OFF GROUND Not permitted</p> <p>PLAYER ROTATION Every player must play a minimum of 50-75% game time with the controlling body determining the exact % of game time per player (excluding injured players).</p> <p>MARKING Any distance, reasonable attempt</p> <p>MERCY RULE</p> <p>COACH ON SIDELINES</p>	<p>BOUNCING THE BALL 1 max</p> <p>KICKING OFF GROUND Not permitted</p> <p>PLAYER ROTATION Every player must play a minimum of 50-75% game time with the controlling body determining the exact % of game time per player (excluding injured players).</p> <p>MARKING 10m, direct catch</p> <p>MERCY RULE</p> <p>COACH ON SIDELINES</p>	<p>BOUNCING THE BALL 1 max</p> <p>KICKING OFF GROUND Not permitted</p> <p>PLAYER ROTATION Every player must play a minimum of 50-75% game time with the controlling body determining the exact % of game time per player (excluding injured players).</p> <p>MARKING 10m, direct catch</p> <p>MERCY RULE</p> <p>COACH ON SIDELINES</p>

Holding the Ball

A player who is in possession of the football is provided an opportunity to dispose of it legally before rewarding an opponent for a legal tackle.

Prior opportunity can include:

- Being balanced and steady
- Having an opportunity to handball or kick the football but choosing not to
- Playing on from a free kick or mark
- Ducking the head into a tackling player
- Driving the head through a stationary tackler
- Fending off or evading a tackle

In modified competitions prior opportunity may also change slightly: once the player has been tagged or 'tackled' they should be allowed 4 steps or approximately 4 seconds to dispose of the football (verbally encourage them during this time). If this doesn't happen, award a free kick to the opposing team and remind the player that next time if they are tackled they have to dispose of the football.

It is important to note when adjudicating holding the ball that the tackle must be legal. Protecting the ball player is paramount; therefore, regardless of whether there has been a prior option if the tackle is not legal (high contact, push in the back, trip etc) you need to penalise the illegal tackle.

It is important that you familiarise yourself with the below decision making matrix so that you can be sure of your thought process when you are field umpiring during the season.

Decision Making Matrix

Prior Opportunity		No Prior Opportunity				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced and Steady • Evade • Fend • Play on from a mark or free kick • Prior option not taken – goes to handball or kick and doesn't • Duck • Drive 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Prior Opportunity to dispose of the football • Tackled Immediately without prior opportunity 				
TACKLED LEGALLY						
Successful Disposal After Tackle	No Successful Disposal After Tackle	Tackle Dislodges Ball	Player Drops Ball	Player makes a genuine attempt (swings hand or foot – Does not need to make Contact)	Player is tackled and is able to but does not make a genuine attempt	Player is tackled and is not able to make a genuine attempt (Ball Pinned)
PLAY ON	Free Kick	PLAY ON	Free Kick	PLAY ON	Free Kick	BALL UP

Legal vs Illegal Tackle

A legal tackle can be made from in front of, behind or to the side of the player with the football. The tackler must grab the player with the ball below the shoulders but above the knees. If the tackle is made above the shoulder you need to blow your whistle and award a free kick for high contact using the correct hand signal; if the tackle is made below the knees you need to blow your whistle and award a free kick for tripping using the correct hand signal.

A tackle is considered dangerous when the level of force is more than what is normally expected in a given situation, uses excessive rotation or a slinging motion, pins the arms, lifts the legs or has two actions leaving the head and/or body in a vulnerable position. When this occurs you need to blow your whistle and award a free kick using the correct hand signal and trigger into the contest to prevent any reaction from the players. You should also consider escalating this to a yellow or red card if required.

Push in the Back

A player whose sole objective is to gain possession of the football is provided every opportunity to do so; therefore, is important as the umpire to protect the ball player, and it is the tacklers responsibility to ensure that the tackle is legal.

While the tackle can be made from behind the player the tackler is not allowed to land on the back of the player who has been tackled. An easy cue to help with recognising this is to ask yourself whether you can see the number of the player who has been tackled; if not, you need to blow your whistle and award a free kick for a push in the back using the correct hand signal.

A player is also not permitted to push the ball carrier in the back while they are in the motion of picking up the ball, running in possession of the ball, taking a mark or after they have disposed of the football.

Ball Up Situations

A ball up is used to restart play after the ball becomes stuck underneath a pack or when the ball goes out of bounds. You must blow your whistle and use the correct hand signal to indicate that you will be doing a ball up where the ball became stuck. If you are conducting the ball up after the ball goes out of bounds you need to bring the ball 10m inside the boundary in line with where it crossed the line. In both instances you need to ask each team to nominate a ruck; no player other than the nominated ruck is permitted to contest the ball until it has hit the ground or been touched by one of the rucks. If an additional player is involved in the ruck you need to pay a free kick against the offending team for a ruck infringement (not the nominated ruck).

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Cards

AFL Queensland Umpiring



PLAYER IS SENT OFF

For any reportable incident where a set penalty will be offered or players to cool off

Player is off for 15 minutes

CAN BE REPLACED IMMEDIATELY

- Player is sent off for a near reportable offence
- Player must leave the field of play for 15 minutes of match time
 - Player can be replaced straight away
 - Player can re-join the game after 15 minutes of match time
- Used as a match management tool to lessen the chance of a player committing a reportable offence
- Examples include: late tackles, provoking behaviour, failing to follow an umpire's instructions, umpire abuse

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PLAYER IS SENT OFF

For any serious incident that will result in direct tribunal referral

Player cannot return to play

CAN BE REPLACED AFTER 15 MINUTES

- Player is reported and sent off for the game
- Player must leave the field of play and not return. Player is not allowed inside the fenced area and/or the field - this includes the breaks
 - Player can only be replaced after 15 minutes
- Examples include: striking (head or groin), kicking, excessive force in a tackle (player's head is put in danger), continuous or vilifying abuse towards an umpire or another player

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COACHES BOX WARNING CARD

1st Warning – No freekick
2nd Warning – 50m freekick
3rd Warning – Coach reported, ejected, freekick & 50m penalty

- Applied for constant inappropriate behaviour displayed by coaches, assistants, managers, runners, bench players and anyone else in the vicinity of the coaches box.
- When an umpire issues a white card they must advise the Ground Marshall (GM) at the next break why the card was issued - the GM will then pass this on to the offending team.
- If abuse is directed towards the umpire while they are issuing the white card award an additional 50m penalty (total of 100m) to the nearest player of the non-offending team

List of Reportable Offences

<u>Rule</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
19.2.2 (a)	(i) striking another person
	(ii) kicking, (iii) kneeling, or (iv) stomping another person
	(v) charging another person
	(vi) engaging in unreasonable rough conduct
	(vii) bumping or forceful contact to an opponent front on
	(viii) head-butting an opponent
	(ix) eye-gouging or making contact to the eye region
	(x) making unnecessary contact to the face
	(xi) making unnecessary contact with an injured player
	(xii) scratching or 19.2.2 (t) pinching another person
	(xiii) tripping whether by hand, arm, foot, or leg
19.2.2 (b)	intentionally making contact with an umpire
19.2.2	(c) Attempting to or (d) Carelessly making contact with an umpire
19.2.2 (e)	spitting at or on an umpire
19.2.2 (f)	spitting at or on another person
19.2.2 (g)	attempting to strike another person
19.2.2 (h)	attempting to kick another person
19.2.2 (i)	attempting to trip by hand, arm, foot, or leg
19.2.2 (j)	using abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene language
19.2.2 (k)	using abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene language to an umpire
19.2.2 (l)	behaving in an abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene manner to an umpire
19.2.2	(m) disputing a decision or (x) an order of an umpire ie: failing to leave playing surface
19.2.2 (n)	use of an obscene gesture
19.2.2 (o)	engaging in time wasting
19.2.2 (p)	engaging in an act of staging
19.2.2 (q)	engaging in a melee (except where sole intention is to remove a teammate)
19.2.2 (r)	instigating a melee
19.2.2 (s)	wrestling another person
19.2.2 (u)	interfering with a player kicking for goal
19.2.2 (w)	intentionally shaking a goal or behind post
19.2.2 (y)	wearing boots, jewellery and equipment under law 9
19.2.2 (z)	engaging in any other act of misconduct

Grading Matrix

Conduct	Impact	Contact	Early Guilty Plea
Intentional	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	N/A
		Body	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	3 Matches
		Body	2 Matches
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches
		Body	1 Match
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	1 Match
		Body	Fine and/or Reprimand
Careless	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	N/A
		Body	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches
		Body	1 Match
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	1 Match
		Body	Fine and/or Reprimand
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	Fine and/or Reprimand
		Body	Fine and/or Reprimand

IMPACT GUIDELINES

- **Low** – Minimal or no impact on the game, and player continues to play unabated or was able to play, and no ongoing issues
- **Medium** – Clearly some impact on the player, and / or The player left the field for a lengthy period of time, and / or Some possible lower level ongoing treatments
- **High** - Major impact on the player, and / or Was not able to participate in the remainder of the game, and / or Major ongoing issues that require medical intervention and / or May miss some matches
- **Severe** - Major impact and serious injury to the player, and / or Likely to miss a significant number of matches.

Hand Signals



Walking onto Field



Starting Quarter
Holding Ball up for Siren



Starting Quarter
Blowing Whistle



High Contact



Push in the Back



Trip



Holding



Play on

Hand Signals



Mark



Kicking in Danger



Holding the Ball (1)



Holding the Ball (2)



All Clear: Goal



All Clear: Behind



End of Quarter (1)



End of Quarter (2)

Hand Signals



Blood Rule



Incorrect Disposal: Throw



Stand



Indicating a Free



Run Too Far



My Ball



Dangerous Tackle (1)



Dangerous Tackle (2)

Hand Signals



Advantage (1)



Advantage (2)



Insufficient Intent



Last Touch (Youth Football Only)



Throw In



Two Umpire Handover: Mine



Two Umpire Handover: Tap Through



Two Umpire Handover: Yours



Interested in becoming an Umpire?
Register Now!



AFLQ Umpiring Department

AFL Queensland Administration & Training Centre
Cansdale Street, Yeronga QLD 4104