



THIS IS *US*

# PREP TO PLAY

COACHING MANUAL

**ENHANCE PERFORMANCE & REDUCE INJURY.  
A PROGRAM FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO PLAY  
COMMUNITY LEVEL AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL.**



In collaboration with



Sport and Exercise Medicine  
Research Centre



## ENHANCE PERFORMANCE AND REDUCE INJURY

- ➔ Information and content in Prep to Play was developed during a collaborative project between the AFL and La Trobe University
- ➔ Prep to Play was co-developed with players, coaches, administrators, medical and high-performance staff involved in Australian Football<sup>28,30,31</sup>
- ➔ Prep to Play is designed to give structure, guidance, education and resources to assist clubs to further develop their existing programs

The Prep to Play program is informed by previous research<sup>20,21,22,29</sup> designed to reduce the risk of injuries and enhance performance.<sup>23,24,25</sup>

Coaches should go to [play.afl/coach/resources/prep-to-play](http://play.afl/coach/resources/prep-to-play) to access video resources which complement this coaching manual.

## THIS PROGRAM FOCUSES ON REDUCING SERIOUS KNEE AND HEAD INJURIES BY:

**1** Improving player muscle function and movement quality during change of direction and landing activities.

**2** Improving safe execution of ground balls, aerial contests, tackling and being tackled.



In field-based team sports, female athletes are 2 to 5 times more likely to sustain an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury compared to male athletes.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

AFLW players have a

**5 to 6x**

greater risk of sustaining an ACL injury compared to male players in the AFL.<sup>32</sup>

AFLW players have double the risk of sustaining a concussion compared to male players in the AFL.<sup>5</sup>

**MAJORITY**

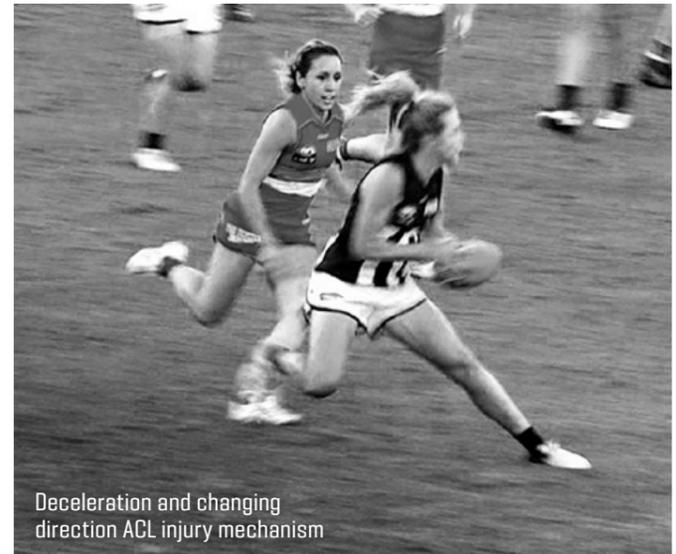
of head injuries in AFLW occur during tackling (or being tackled), ground balls or aerial contests.

Despite limited injury surveillance data, serious knee and head injuries are a priority in community level football.<sup>26</sup>

More than

**90%**

of ACL injuries in the AFLW occur in positions with no or minimal contact, often when decelerating and changing direction, or landing on one leg.<sup>33</sup>



Deceleration and changing direction ACL injury mechanism



Landing on one leg ACL injury mechanism



## ENHANCE PERFORMANCE\*

## REDUCE INJURY BY UP TO 50%\*

\* Benefits based upon similar programs <sup>20 21 22 23 24 25</sup>

### Increase athletic performance

Speed, vertical jump, agility, strength and coordination.



Increase player availability for games

Increase chance of winning games



**INJURIES CAN BE REDUCED**  
But only when you stick with  
**THE PROGRAM!**

Benefits are greater if the program is performed at every training and match.

## EVERY TRAINING SESSION – Dynamic Warm Up, Football Skills, and Strength Exercises

## MATCH DAY – Dynamic Warm Up Only (10 Minutes)

The activities for each component are provided on pages 6–19.

### DYNAMIC WARM UP

10 minutes at the start of every training session and game

**8 activities:** jog and mobility, deceleration, change of direction, landing, landing with contact, sprints, contact skills, balance.

Warm-up exercises are provided on pages 6-7

### FOOTBALL SKILLS

At least 5 minutes every training session

**Practice these skills every training session:**

- Tackling and receiving a tackle
- Aerial
- Ground balls

Example drills are provided on page 9-17

### STRENGTH EXERCISES

5 to 10 minutes before, during, or after every training session

**Perform 3 strength exercises:**

1. Lower-limb
2. Hamstring and gluteal
3. Core and hip

Strengthening exercises are provided on page 18-19

### EDUCATION

Dedicate at least 2x10 minute sessions to provide education when starting the program with your team.

**Provide players, support staff, and parents with education about Prep to Play:**

- Why, how, and when the program will be implemented
- Direct them to the posters and video resources
- Exercise technique (Page 23)
- General injury prevention principles (Page 22)

# PREP TO PLAY DYNAMIC WARM UP PROGRAM



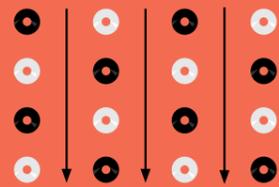
# PREP TO PLAY DYNAMIC WARM UP PROGRAM



**DO ALL 8 ACTIVITIES – THEY ARE ALL IMPORTANT!**

Choose A, B or C for each activity

10 minutes every training session and match



Players start here and perform movements through the cones  
16 cones (8 of each colour)

## JOG AT LEAST 200M & AT LEAST 1 MOBILITY EXERCISE

**1**

**A**

**HAMSTRING SWEEP**  
Get low, sweep fingers to the grass, alternate sides.

x5 EACH SIDE

**B**

**LEG SWING**  
Swing leg forwards and backwards or side to side.

x5 EACH SIDE

**C**

**OPEN/CLOSE GATE**  
Lift knee to hip height. Sweep hip out to open sweep in to close, alternate sides.

x5 EACH SIDE

## DECELERATION

**2**

**A**

**STUTTER STEP**  
At each cone decelerate & rapidly move your feet on the spot for 3 secs.

REPEAT x2

**B**

**ONE LEG STOP**  
Get low & use short quick steps. Finish in athletic stance.

x1 EACH SIDE

**C**

**FORWARD 2 BACKWARD 1**  
Accelerate forwards 2 cones, then backtrack 1 cone.

REPEAT x2

## CHANGE OF DIRECTION

**3**

**A**

**45 DEG ZIG ZAG CUTS**  
Using short quick steps, get low and use outside leg to plant & push off.

REPEAT x2

**B**

**PARTNER ZIG ZAG - NO CONTACT**  
Start on cones next to each other. Zig-zag around cones avoiding contact with partner. Make it a race.

REPEAT x2

**C**

**PARTNER ZIG ZAG - CONTACT**  
Zig-zag around cones racing a partner. You can bump each other as you move through. Compete for a ball at the end.

REPEAT x2

## JUMP AND LAND

**4**

**A**

**DOT THE I**  
Jump forward and then jump up straight away. Land in athletic stance.

REPEAT x10

**B**

**BOUNGING**  
Leap off right leg, landing on left leg, moving forward as you bound left to right.

REPEAT x10 EACH SIDE

**C**

**HOPS**  
Hop forward as far as you can. Keep foot, knee, and hip in line.

REPEAT x10 EACH SIDE

## JUMP AND LAND - CONTACT

**5**

**A**

**PARTNER PUSH**  
From a standing double leg start, jump high and have a partner bump you in the air. Land in athletic stance.

x5 EACH SIDE

**B**

**RUNNING PARTNER PUSH**  
Run, jump off 1 leg. Drive the knee closest to your partner up. Partner bumps you in the air. Land in athletic stance.

x5 EACH SIDE

**C**

**RUNNING PARTNER PUSH & TWIST**  
Run, jump off 1 leg, and in the air turn the body 90 degrees. Partner bumps you in the air. Land in athletic stance.

x5 EACH SIDE

## CONTACT

**6**

**A**

**PARTNER BUMP/CHECK**  
Get low in athletic stance and bump your partner. (x5 each side) Or bump (check) your partner as they try to run to the end cone (1 turn each).

2x30s

**B**

**TACKLING BREAKDOWN**  
Chest on chest, chin to back. Get feet close, get low and drive legs. Swap sides until coach blows whistle - try to push partner over the line.

2x30s

**C**

**FALLING/ROLLING**  
Tuck the right arm and head through, lower the body and roll onto the back on the right shoulder, diagonally across the back, landing on the left hip.

x3-5 EACH SIDE

## SPRINTING

**7**

**SPRINTS**  
Sprints of 30m. Build up to 80-90% of top speed.  
**Partner option:** Race from a lying position.

REPEAT x2-3

## BALANCE

**8**

**BALANCE**  
Balancing on one leg, handball with a partner.

1 MINUTE EACH SIDE

**VIEW THE VIDEOS AT  
PLAY.AFL/COACH/  
RESOURCES/  
PREP-TO-PLAY/**

# PREP TO PLAY WHICH EXERCISES SHOULD MY PLAYERS START WITH?



The Prep-to-Play dynamic warm up and strength exercises have options A, B and C. Most options increase in difficulty (A=easier, C=harder), but some options are there to target different muscles groups and movements or for variety.

Aim to get all players to Option C, and use Option A and B to provide variety, or for players who cannot perform Option C due to excessive soreness or ability.

If Level A exercises are too hard, or the player is complaining of soreness, modified warm-up exercises are provided below and on page 19 for the strength program.

## PREP TO PLAY MODIFIED WARM UP



If players are reporting knee soreness during jumping and landing exercises in the warm up they can perform these activities instead:

### CALF EXERCISES



#### CALF RAISES

With shoulder width apart and knees straight, raise and lower your heel.

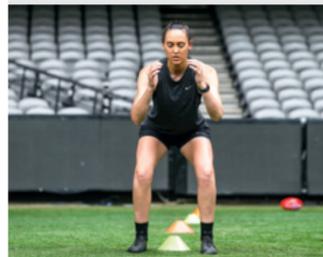
OR



#### POGO BOUNCES

Keep knees straight. Bounce forward in continuous motion keeping heels up.

### LOWER IMPACT EXERCISES



#### DOUBLE LEG SQUAT

Keep knees in line with hips, bend hips & knees. Lower bottom to the ground like sitting on a low chair.

**Harder:** hands above head.

OR



#### ARABESQUE

Extend leg behind balancing on one leg. Aim to extend body and back leg parallel with ground.

**REMEMBER! SOME SORENESS IS EXPECTED AFTER COMPLETING THE STRENGTH EXERCISES - PARTICULARLY 24-48 HOURS AFTER.**

If the player is consistently complaining of soreness which is affecting their ability to participate, encourage them to see a physiotherapist.

To find a Prep to Play trained physiotherapist in your region contact [prep2play@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:prep2play@latrobe.edu.au)

# PREP TO PLAY FOOTBALL SKILLS



## ARE YOU PRACTICING YOUR FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTALS?

Go to the CoachAFL Prep-to-Play section to view the posters and videos. Practice these skills every training session.



1 - TACKLING



2 - RECEIVING A TACKLE



3 - AERIAL



4 - GROUND BALLS



### MONTHLY COACHES SHED

Online drop-in with other coaches, facilitated by coach ambassadors, AFL Coaching team, or a La Trobe University research team member.

Share ideas, drills, or troubleshoot in a casual, safe and friendly environment.

Email [prep2play@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:prep2play@latrobe.edu.au) for more info



### NEED INSPIRATION FOR YOUR TRAINING SESSIONS?

Login to RM Coach using your CoachAFL member login to access training activities, session plans and more... tailored for your team!

## REDUCE HEAD, NECK & SHOULDER INJURIES



Winning contested ground balls will improve team performance.

**Coaches have a duty of care to dedicate training time to educate players on how to perform the skill safely.**

### Coaching Tip →

"Putting your head over the ball" is an expression coaches may use. However, it's important coaches clearly interpret this for players & discourage them from leading with their head towards oncoming contact.



**ACTIVE FEET & AWARENESS**  
Prepare for ball/opposition movement

**GET LOW BEHIND BALL**  
Get nails dirty

**OVERSTRIDE/FLAT-FOOTED**  
Reaching/squatting for ball

### Coaching Tip →

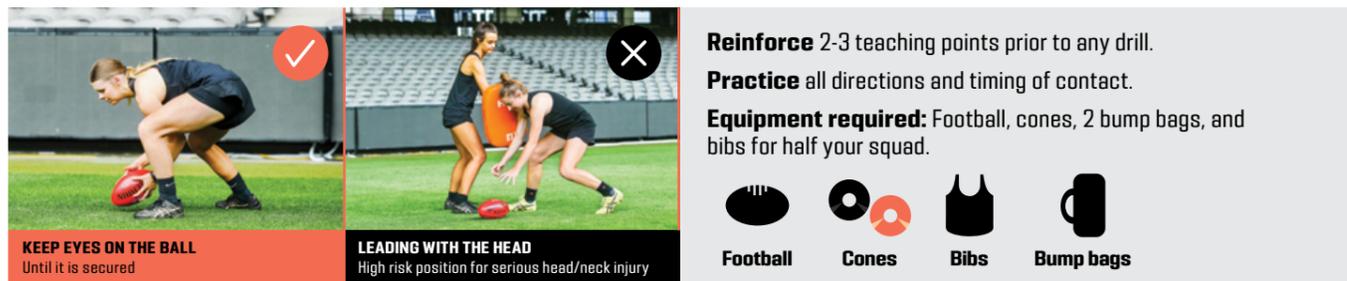
Remind players its okay to make mistakes or fumble, especially when they are trying new skills.



**PROTECTION**  
Front foot, round shoulders

**STAY LOW**  
Drive legs towards target

**STANDING UPRIGHT TOO EARLY**  
Easily tackled or fumble



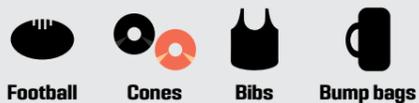
**KEEP EYES ON THE BALL**  
Until it is secured

**LEADING WITH THE HEAD**  
High risk position for serious head/neck injury

**Reinforce** 2-3 teaching points prior to any drill.

**Practice** all directions and timing of contact.

**Equipment required:** Football, cones, 2 bump bags, and bibs for half your squad.



## TECHNIQUE: Uncontested ground balls

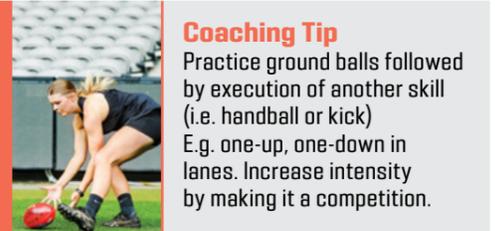
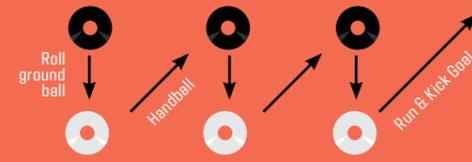
**ACTIVITY 1**  
3-6 players  
10 mins

### Soccer Ball/ Medicine Ball

- Round balls - more predictable
- Medicine ball - forces players to focus on picking the ball up and engaging their core and leg muscles to drive through the ball



**ACTIVITY 2**  
8-10 players  
10 mins  
10x10m area



### Coaching Tip

Practice ground balls followed by execution of another skill (i.e. handball or kick)  
E.g. one-up, one-down in lanes. Increase intensity by making it a competition.

## PROGRESSIVE DRILLS: Contested ground balls

**ACTIVITY 3**  
8-10 players  
10 mins  
10x10m area

**Drill Variations**  
Rolling ball, vary direction of approach/contact



→ Feeder rolls ball in

→ Front inside foot protection

→ Handball to receiver

**Progression**  
Replace bump bag with opponent and make it competitive

Small groups: At least 4 players in line, 1 feeder, 1 with bump bag, 1-2 receivers

**ACTIVITY 4**  
8-15 players  
5-10 mins  
10-15m circle area

**Drill Variations**  
Add a third number.  
Smaller area favours tackler, more inside tackles



→ Number players '1', '2'... etc.

→ '1' and '6' compete

**Progression**  
Circle of death 30 second repeat efforts:  
2 players get ground balls off outside players whilst getting bumped by 2 players

## SMALL-SIDED GAMES

**ACTIVITY 5**  
14-30+ players  
10min  
5-8x5-8m area

**Drill Variations**  
Larger area, less defenders favours ball carrier & opportunity for clean possession



→ One up, one down grids

### Coaching Tip

Get players to take turns feeding the balls.  
**Coaches - coach!**

## REDUCE HEAD, NECK, AND SHOULDER INJURIES



→ Increase effective tackles



Coaches have a duty of care to dedicate training time to educating players on tackling technique.

### COACHING POINTS: Inside tackle (Tackler close to ball-carrier)

#### Coaching Tip →

Provide immediate positive feedback on good execution of tackling.



**GET LOW:** Stay low  
→ Active feet. Drive legs



**DRIVE LEGS**  
Use momentum



**Upright**  
Flat footed



**BODY ON BODY:** Chin to back  
→ Pin elbows



**ROLL & DROP**  
With control



**REACHING**  
Tackling with hands

**DUTY OF CARE**  
Protect opponent  
control their  
body

### COACHING POINTS: Outside tackle (Tackler has to run to close space)



**GET LOW**  
Quick steps & feet close  
→ Inside shoulder



**CORRAL TOWARDS SIDELINE**  
Aim for inside shoulder  
→ Roll & drop, protect opponent, don't sling



**OVERSTRIDE**  
Lunge & reach = ineffective tackles  
→ Higher risk position for serious knee injury

#### Coaching Tip →

Reinforce a maximum of 2-3 technique points prior to commencing any drill. Practice tackling from all angles. Use simple cues. E.g. "Hit and stick"

### TECHNIQUE - Partner walk throughs

#### ACTIVITY 1

##### INSIDE TACKLES

3 Group size  
5-10 mins, 5x5m area  
Practice from front, side and behind. Standing next to partner

##### Progression

Separate 2-3m, Feed ground ball or handball and players increase speed on approach



→ Increase intensity when technique is sound and players feel comfortable

#### ACTIVITY 2

##### OUTSIDE TACKLES

3 Group size  
5-10 mins, 5x5m area

##### Behind/Side

Tackler stands 5m behind Player 2. Player 3 feeds ground ball

##### Front

Tackler stands 5m in front of tackler. Player 3 feeds ground ball in front



→ Increase intensity when technique is sound and players feel comfortable

#### Coaching Tip →

Cue players to note how a tackle felt, or the sound it made. Good tackle = nice thud/connection sound

### PROGRESSIVE DRILLS

#### ACTIVITY 3

##### TACKLING GATES

6-10 Group size  
5-10 mins  
5-8x5-8m area

##### Drill Variations

Smaller area favours tackler

##### 1v1, 2v2 or 3v3

→ 2 lines stand diagonally opposite, 2 players run around cones to meet in the middle  
→ Player feeds handball/ground to nominated ball carrier  
→ Tacklers score points for stopping ball carrier get through their "gate"



→ Run around cone -meet in middle



→ Cueing: Corral, push ball carrier one way

#### ACTIVITY 4

##### CIRCLE DRILL

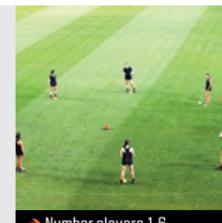
8-12 Group size  
5-10 mins  
10-15m circle

##### Drill Variations

Smaller area favours tackler, more inside tackles

##### Set up

→ Ball starts in middle (Progression: ball is rolled in). Call out 2 numbers. "1" is ball carrier. "6" is tackler  
→ Ball carrier aims to pick up ball and return to any player (Progression: to certain player or coach)



→ Number players 1-6



→ "1" and "6" compete



→ Close space body on body

#### Coaching Tip →

Get players to take turns kicking the balls. Coaches - coach!

### SMALL-SIDED GAMES

#### ACTIVITY 5

##### TACKLING GRIDS

14-30+ Group size  
10 mins  
5-8x5-8m area

##### Drill Variations

More defenders = more tackles, Smaller area, favours tackler

##### Progressions

→ After 4 handballs, work ball to Group 2, or a backs vs forwards situation suiting your needs (i.e. 3v2)



→ 4 attackers, 3 defenders in one grid



# PREP TO PLAY RECEIVING, BREAKING, OR AVOIDING TACKLES

# PREP TO PLAY RECEIVING, BREAKING, OR AVOIDING TACKLES DRILLS

## REDUCE HEAD, NECK & SHOULDER INJURIES



→ Increase a player's ability to break free and reduce congestion



Coaches have a duty of care to dedicate training time to educate players on how to receive a tackle/contact in order to reduce injuries.

**Coaching Tip** → Once a player is tackled, encourage them to get and stay low, keep their feet active, and drive their legs to try get out of the tackle.



**GET LOW**  
Active feet and drive legs



**STAY LOW**



**ENGAGE CORE**



**TOO UPRIGHT**  
Floppy in the tackle, not driving legs

**Coaching Tip** → Reinforce these points with ground ball drills to make players cleaner below knees and avoid tackles.



**SPATIAL AWARENESS**  
Knowing where contact is coming from



**PROTECTION**  
Keep back shoulder away



**DUTY OF CARE**  
Reinforce to players to take responsibility for how they attack the ball safely to protect themselves.



**NO AWARENESS/LEADING WITH HEAD**  
High risk position for serious head/neck injury



**ARMS FREE**  
Dispose of ball



**CHOP ARMS or FEND OFF**  
To avoid approaching tackler



**UPRIGHT**  
Flat footed not getting arms free

## TECHNIQUE: Partner walk throughs

**ACTIVITY 1**  
**RECEIVING TACKLES**  
2-3 Group size  
10 mins  
5x5m area

**Increase intensity**  
→ When technique is sound, and players feel comfortable  
→ Pair practice helps increase confidence in accepting contact  
→ Cue players to keep ball secure



## PROGRESSIVE DRILLS:

**ACTIVITY 2**  
**BREAKING AND AVOIDING TACKLES**  
5-6 Group size  
10 mins  
10x15m circle

→ Groups of 5-6, one handball to ball carrier, one tackler. Practice chopping arms or fending off and run into a shot on goal

**Drill Variations**  
Start players in different positions



**ACTIVITY 3**  
**TACKLING GATES**  
6-10 players  
10 mins  
5-8x5-8m area

**Drill Variations**  
Larger = more outside tackles. Smaller favours tackler



→ Run around cone - meet in middle



→ Ball carrier aims to exit gates



→ Stay low, drive legs, arms free

→ 2 lines stand diagonally opposite, 2 players run around cones to meet in the middle. Progression: 2v2, 3v3.  
→ Player feeds handball/ground to nominated ball carrier.  
→ Ball carrier aims to get through their "gate" or dispose of ball to receiver behind the gate.

**Coaching Tip** → Get players to take turns feeding the balls. **Coaches - coach!**

## SMALL-SIDED GAMES

**ACTIVITY 4**  
14-30+ players  
5-10 mins  
5-8x5-8m area

**Drill Variations**  
Larger area favours ball carrier



→ 4 attackers, 3 defenders in one grid



→ One up, one down grids



→ Cue ball carriers: get arms free

→ Progression: After 4 handballs, work ball to Group 2, or a backs vs forwards situation suiting your needs (i.e. 3v2)

## REDUCE LOWER LIMB, HEAD & FINGER INJURIES



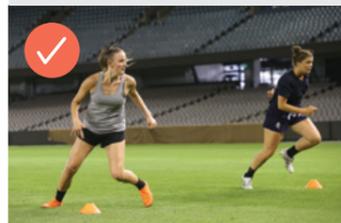
→ Improve athleticism and football performance in contests



Coaches have a duty of care to dedicate training time to educate players on how to approach aerial contests.

## COACHING POINTS: Preparing feet & body, and launching

**Coaching Tip** → Coaching players how to prepare and position their body prior to, during and after an aerial contest is essential, to increase contested marks or spoils and player safety.



**SPACIAL AWARENESS**  
Turn head & read cues of kicker



**FOOTWORK - ACTIVE FEET**  
Run an arc to come forward at the ball



**DUTY OF CARE**  
Educate players that they should not back pedal into a contest

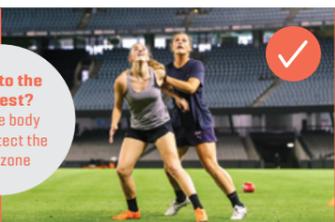


**LAUNCH OFF ONE LEG**  
Take at highest point



**INSIDE LEG PROTECTION**

Early to the contest? Engage body and protect the drop zone



**SITTING DUCK**  
Waiting under ball = vulnerable position and will get out-marked/spoiled

## COACHING POINTS: Marking & landing

**Coaching Tip** → Taking eyes off ball & moving head to the side = dropped marks & finger injuries.



**EYES ON THE BALL**  
"W" hands



**HEAD TO SIDE**  
Not looking at ball



**LAND - ATHLETIC STANCE**  
Next play ready



**STIFF LANDING**  
Unbalanced = High risk position for serious knee injury

**Coaching Tip** → Reinforce a maximum of 2-3 technique points prior to commencing any drill. Keep cues simple. Use analogies such as 'W' or 'Butterfly hands'.

## TECHNIQUE

**ACTIVITY 1  
STATIONARY MARKING**  
2-3 group size  
10 mins  
10m area



→ Watch ball into hands

- Stationary throwing firm ball into hands 2-3m away
- Stationary kicking into hands with player on knees, then on feet
- Walking through ball - increase speed as able

**ACTIVITY 2  
UNCONTESTED FOOTWORK AND LAUNCHING**

- Vary starting positions and flight of ball - players should adjust footwork if fumble, last one standing = winner



**Noodle whack drill**  
→ Players in lines run through for marks and one player whacks them with a foam noodle. Drop out if fumble, last one standing = winner

**Coaching Tip** → Cue players to adjust footwork, and body work as needed depending on each contest.

## PROGRESSIVE DRILLS

**ACTIVITY 3  
TOKEN CONTACT**  
6-8 group size  
10 mins  
10-20m area

**Drill Variations**  
Vary starting locations and side of contact

- Use a token opponent with a bump bag to simulate contact
- Encourage players to protect their body with their inside/lead leg, and launch at the ball



→ Protect with inside knee

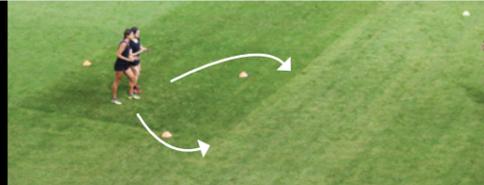


→ Practice both sides & new starting points

**Coaching Tip** → Get players to take turns kicking the balls. **Coaches - coach!**

**ACTIVITY 4  
1v1 CONTESTED MARKING**  
6-8 group size  
10 mins  
10-20m area

**Drill Variations**  
Larger square. Or designate starting points to force practice of particular situations



- 4 cones with 2 players starting in the middle
- Instruct to run to the back (or front, or opposite to partner)



→ Launch at the ball



→ Engage body if early to contest

## SMALL-SIDED GAMES

**ACTIVITY 5  
MARKING GRIDS 4v3**  
8-10 group size  
10 mins  
15-10m area

**Drill Variations**  
Adjust number of players, size of grid, or ratio of defenders: attackers

- Progressions**
- Initially you may have players stationary on the corner
  - Attackers can move around
  - Kicker at each end - defenders to communicate and come forward to find players at the front



# PREP TO PLAY STRENGTH PROGRAM



# PREP TO PLAY MODIFIED STRENGTH PROGRAM



## COMPLETE 3 ACTIVITIES

You can choose A, B or C for each activity

10 minutes total (before, during or after every training session)

TO VIEW THE VIDEOS GO TO:  
[PLAY.AFL/COACH/RESOURCES/  
PREP-TO-PLAY](https://play.afl/coach/resources/prep-to-play)

## COMPLETE 3 ACTIVITIES

You can choose A, B or C for each activity

5-10 minutes (before, during or after every training session)

If players report soreness with any of the strength exercises or the activities are too hard, it is important they still complete strength exercises. Some easier modifications to the normal program are outlined below.

1 - LOWER LIMB	<p><b>A LUNGES</b> Keep body straight, keep hips, knees and feet in line. Don't let the knee collapse inwards. Try to keep your upper body steady. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>	<p><b>B CLOCKFACE</b> In a mini squat, lightly tap the opposite foot around an imaginary clock at 12, 3, 6 &amp; 9 o'clock. Keep hip and knee in line. <b>Harder:</b> make a larger clock. <b>x3 SETS EACH SIDE</b></p>	<p><b>C REVERSE NORDICS</b> In upright kneeling, slowly lean your body backwards as far as you can control. Keep your hips straight. Hold for 1 second then slowly return your body upright. <b>2x5 REPS</b></p>
	<p><b>A GLUTE BRIDGE</b> With one foot on the ground and the other in the air, lift your bottom off the ground as high as you can, pushing through your heels. Keep pelvis and thighs stable and in line. <b>Easier:</b> hands on ground. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>	<p><b>B HAMSTRING BRIDGE</b> With one leg on a bench/ball and the other leg in the air, lift your bottom off the ground as high as you can. <b>Alternate Option:</b> Bridge off your partners shoulder. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>	<p><b>C NORDIC HAMSTRING LOWERS</b> With a partner holding your feet in kneeling, keep hips straight. Slowly lean forward as far as possible, then fall to ground landing in push up position. <b>Alternate option:</b> Control to point you can control. Pause for 1 second and return to start. <b>2x5 REPS</b></p>
	<p><b>A FRONT PLANK OR WHEELBARROW</b> Hold your body off the ground leaning on your elbows and feet. Keep your body straight and head tucked in. <b>Wheelbarrow:</b> Partner 1, set up in push-up position. Partner 2, stand behind your partner's feet. Lift Partner 1 legs. Partner 1 walks their hands forward to under their shoulders. Hold this position. <b>2x30-60 SECONDS</b></p>	<p><b>B SIDE PLANK</b> Lie on your side with legs on top of each other. Lean on your elbow and lift hips off the ground and hold. Create a straight line from ears to toes. <b>Easier option:</b> on knees. <b>Harder option:</b> lift leg and arm. <b>2x30-60 SECONDS</b></p>	<p><b>C COPENHAGEN GROIN</b> <b>Modified:</b> Partner 2 holds at the knee while the partner 1 is in a side plank position. Bring bottom foot up to touch the top foot, and then return the foot towards the ground in a controlled manner. <b>Full:</b> As above, but partner 2 holds partner 1 at the ankle. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>

1 - LOWER LIMB	<p><b>A SINGLE LEG CALF RAISES</b> Using a partner for balance, stand on one leg keeping your knee straight. Raise and lower your heel. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>	<p><b>B DOUBLE LEG SQUAT</b> Keep knees in line with hips, bend hips and knees. Lower bottom to the ground like sitting on a low chair. <b>2x10 REPS</b></p>	<p><b>C HALF LUNGE OR LUNGE HOLD</b> Keeping feet shoulder width apart, stand in a split stance. Lower back knee half way to ground, keeping front knee behind toes. <b>2x10 REPS</b></p>
	<p><b>A MODIFIED GLUTE BRIDGE - DOUBLE LEG</b> Lift your bottom as high as you can, pushing through your heels. <b>2x10 REPS</b></p>	<p><b>B MODIFIED HAMSTRING BRIDGE - DOUBLE LEG</b> With both feet on a bench (or partners hands), knees slightly bent, lift your bottom off the ground. <b>2x10 REPS</b></p>	<p><b>C MODIFIED HAMSTRING - ARABESQUE</b> Extend leg behind balancing on one leg. Aim to extend body and back leg parallel with ground. <b>2x10 REPS EACH SIDE</b></p>
	<p><b>A MODIFIED KNEE PLANK</b> Hold your body by leaning on your elbows and knees. Keep your body straight and head tucked in. <b>2x30-60 SECONDS</b></p>	<p><b>B MODIFIED SIDE PLANK</b> Lie on your side with legs on top of each other. Lean on your elbow and knees. Lift hips off the ground and hold. <b>2x30-60 SECONDS</b></p>	<p><b>C MODIFIED GROIN - BALL SQUEEZE</b> Lie on your back and squeeze the ball as hard as you can. <b>2x15 SECOND HOLDS</b></p>

**REMEMBER! SOME SORENESS IS EXPECTED AFTER COMPLETING THE STRENGTH EXERCISES - PARTICULARLY 24-48 HOURS AFTER.**

If the player is consistently complaining of soreness which is affecting their ability to participate, encourage them to see a physiotherapist.

To find a Prep to Play trained physiotherapist in your region contact [prep2play@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:prep2play@latrobe.edu.au)

VIEW THE STRENGTH VIDEOS AT  
[PLAY.AFL/COACH/RESOURCES/PREP-TO-PLAY](https://play.afl/coach/resources/prep-to-play)

# PREP TO PLAY EDUCATION CHECKLIST SESSION 1



# PREP TO PLAY EDUCATION CHECKLIST SESSION 2



**IN THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF STARTING TO USE PREP TO PLAY RUN TWO EDUCATION SESSIONS (≈10 MINUTES) WITH YOUR PLAYERS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND PARENTS**



**IN THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF STARTING TO USE PREP TO PLAY RUN TWO EDUCATION SESSIONS (≈10 MINUTES) WITH YOUR PLAYERS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND PARENTS.**

## WHAT IS PREP TO PLAY?

**4 elements - dynamic warm-up, football skills, strength exercises, education**

- ➔ **Dynamic warm up** focusses on landing, deceleration, change of direction
- ➔ **Football skills** focusses on tackling, being tackled, aerial, and ground balls
- ➔ **Strength exercises** focusses on lower limb, hamstring/glutes, and core strength
- ➔ **Education** - program what, when, why, how

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS?

- ➔ Make you a better football player - don't get knocked off the ball
- ➔ Make you a better player - improve speed and agility, vertical jump
- ➔ Reduce your risk of injury - up to 50% reduction in other sports

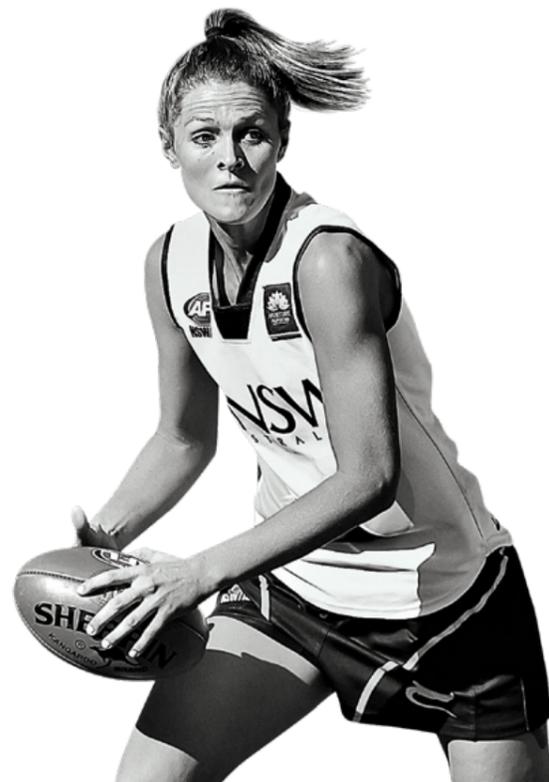
## WHEN WILL WE DO IT? WHO WILL LEAD IT?

- ➔ Dynamic warm-up - before every training and game 10 minutes
- ➔ Strength exercises - before, during or after training 5 to 10 minutes
- ➔ Football skills - during training with focus on the 4 skills

**Players can lead the warm-up and strength exercises once they are familiar with the program.**



**Provide players with manuals to be kept at club and the link to the online posters and videos**

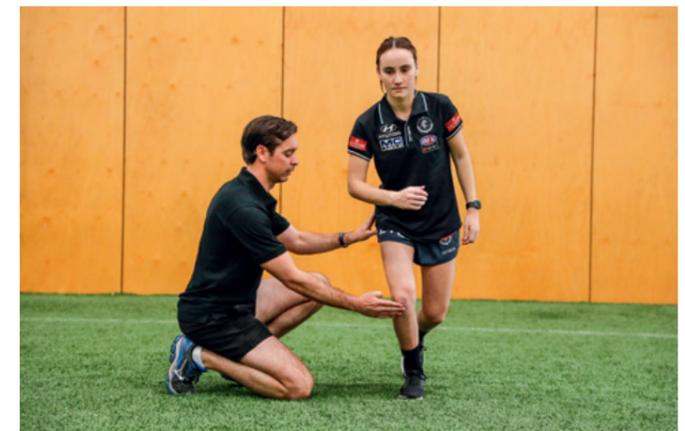


## WHAT IS GOOD TECHNIQUE?

- ➔ Squatting and landing
- ➔ Deceleration, change of direction
- ➔ Strength exercises technique
- ➔ Refer to Page 24 for details

## GENERAL TIPS - IMPROVING PERFORMANCE & REDUCING INJURY

- ➔ Management of injuries and expectations
  - ➔ **If players are injured, encourage them to still come to training and games.** There is always things they can do to improve and be a part of the team
  - ➔ Ensure players **manage their injuries**. A link to a list of recommended sports medicine providers and endorsed Prep to Play physiotherapists is provided on Page 18
  - ➔ **Some soreness is expected** with the strength exercises
- ➔ Player **well-being and recovery**
  - ➔ Physical and mental health
  - ➔ Sleep, eat, hydrate
  - ➔ Active recovery
  - ➔ Rest and balance in their life
  - ➔ Refer to Page 23 for details



**HAVE YOU PUT THE THREE PREP TO PLAY POSTERS UP AT THE CLUB?**

Direct players to the Prep to Play player manual for further info



# PREP TO PLAY

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE AND REDUCE INJURY RISK



Coaches play a vital role in providing general education to players about the various aspects that can reduce injury and enhance performance:

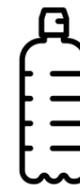
### TOP 8 TIPS FOR ENHANCING PLAYER WELLBEING



Players should aim for 8 hours of sleep per night. Sleep is vital for preparing for and recovering from training and games. **1**



Players should enjoy a balanced diet that limits added sugars and alcohol. This gives you optimum energy for training. **2**



Players should ensure rehydration to restore fluid and electrolyte balance after training and games. **3**



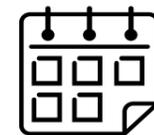
Players should report & manage injuries in conjunction with their coaches, physio's and/or doctor. Encourage players to seek advice if unwell or injured. **4**



Encourage players to use active recovery techniques such as walking, swimming, or bike riding. Avoid long periods of sitting. **5**



Choose recovery strategies that work best for you and make you feel good. This may include ice baths, hot/cold showers or pool mobility. Better muscle recovery = better performance. **6**



Coaches and players should be aware the menstrual cycle and/or associated symptoms may affect wellbeing and performance. If players report symptoms such as severe cramping or irregular periods medical advice should be sought. **7**



Players need to look after their mental wellbeing and have balance in their lives. This will be individual and might involve mindfulness training, meditation, yoga or any activities that promote relaxation and rest. **8**

# PREP TO PLAY HOW DO I KNOW IF A PLAYER HAS GOOD TECHNIQUE?

# PREP TO PLAY HOW TO FALL

Coaches play a vital role in providing feedback on movement technique. Access the videos on [play.afl](http://play.afl) for more details of good and poor technique.

Contact is a hallmark of our game, and a reason many players love to play. However, the contact nature causes often causes players to lose their balance and tumble to the ground. It is crucial for players to be able to fall safely to avoid head, neck and upper limb injuries.



vs



## JUMPING, LANDING, & SQUATTING



✓ Land in an athletic stance (bending at knees and hips). Keep knees in line with hips.



✗ Hip and knee collapse. Torso leaning to the side.

## CHANGE OF DIRECTION



✓ Using short quick steps, get low and use outside leg to plant and push off.



✗ Over striding too upright, Foot too far outside base of support.

## DECELERATION



✓ Busy feet with short quick steps on balls of feet. Get low by bending knees and hips.



✗ Too upright, heavy steps. Over striding with large, long, heavy steps. Upright posture.

## PLANK



✓ Create a straight line from ears to toes. Elbows under shoulders, head tucked in looking at the ground.



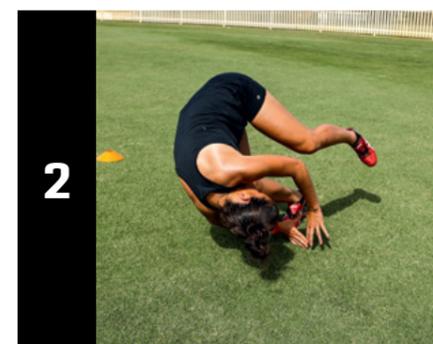
✗ Hips sagging too low. Hips bending too high. Don't round the shoulders or strain through the neck.



**DO NOT BRACE FOR FALL WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS. THIS PUTS THE WRIST, ELBOW AND SHOULDER IN A VULNERABLE POSITION.**



1 In a squatted position tuck the head under. Look away from where from the direction you are going to roll.



2 Lower the body and use body weight momentum to roll. Lightly brush hands across the ground - they should not take the weight.



3 Roll onto the back on the right shoulder. Try to keep yourself in a tight ball.



4 Use the momentum to roll diagonally across the back.



5 Finish on the left hip. The momentum of the roll should take player to point 6.



6 Roll up to half kneeling. Reset. Repeat 3 rolls each side!

## PRACTICE BOTH SIDES!

Progress to starting from a standing, walking, then jogging position as players are competent and feel confident in their technique.

# PREP TO PLAY HOW TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK



# PREP TO PLAY EFFECTIVE SKILL PROGRESSION



## STRATEGIES WHICH MAY MAXIMISE LEARNING OF FOOTBALL AND MOVEMENT SKILLS INCLUDE:<sup>16</sup>

- 1** External or goal-related cues:<sup>17</sup> Use external cues such as "get low" rather than describing coordination of body parts such as "bend your hip and knee."
- 2** Give positive feedback on correct technique to increase confidence and motivation. Prompt players to note how technique feels, or the output (e.g. higher jump or effective tackle). This will improve motor learning.
- 3** Teammate feedback: Once competency is established, get players to observe each other and provide feedback. This will increase competitiveness and motivation.<sup>19</sup>

Examples of technique and cue words are given for the dynamic warm up and football specific skills are provided on page 24, and page 9-17, respectively.



## TIMING AND TYPE



**Immediate verbal or visual feedback**  
Provide verbal feedback during or immediately after the activity. Combine with visual demonstration with the player/group.



**Video Playback**  
Coaches may wish to film a player performing a skill to provide feedback, or utilise match footage if available.

## OPTIMAL CHALLENGE POINT



## COACHING TIP: WHERE POSSIBLE PROGRESS TASK DIFFICULTY USING THE PRINCIPLES BELOW

- 1** Start with simple activities, in controlled, uncontested, situations. Skills should be closed with minimal decision making. Progress difficulty if good technique is observed (see posters on pages 6-7 and 9-17)
- 2** Progress difficulty by
  - ➔ Increasing speed, intensity (e.g. jump higher/further) and amount of contact
  - ➔ Making activities less predictable (e.g. players change direction in response to coach hand signal or whistle)
  - ➔ Increasing attentional demands and decision making (e.g. whilst performing agility drills players call out the number of fingers the coach is holding up)
- 3**
  - ➔ Ensure good technique during warm-up activities (e.g. jumping and landing) is transferred into football specific activities (marking/spoiling)
  - ➔ Ensure good technique of football skills are transferred into small-sided games and match play

## HOW LONG DOES PREP TO PLAY TAKE?

The warm-up and strength components together take between 15 and 20 minutes. Time spent on the specific Prep to Play football skills (e.g. tackling, aerial contests and ground balls) will vary and is up to the coach.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE UNTIL PREP TO PLAY HAS AN EFFECT?

Improvement in movement quality and skill can occur in 3 to 4 weeks. For muscle strength, this may take up to 6 to 8 weeks. These timelines are an estimate, and are based on 2 to 3 sessions per week.

## WHEN CAN PLAYERS STOP PREP TO PLAY?

Players should continue using the Prep to Play or as long as they play football, as the effects of the program wear off when they stop performing the exercises.

## HOW OLD DO PLAYERS HAVE TO BE FOR PREP TO PLAY?

The Prep to Play program is being evaluated (2021-2023) in players aged 14 and older. Therefore, the effects of Prep to Play are uncertain for all age groups. In other sports, programs (e.g. FIFA 11+) with similar exercises are effective at reducing injuries (with minimal negative side effects) in players 7 years and older.<sup>22</sup>

## DO PLAYERS HAVE TO WARM UP BEFORE PREP TO PLAY?

No, the "Prep to Play" is a complete warm-up program that replaces other such programs

## WHAT TYPE OF FOOTWEAR IS RECOMMENDED FOR PREP TO PLAY? WHERE SHOULD IT BE PERFORMED?

Ideally, the exercises should be performed on grass with football boots. If access to the ground is limited, the exercises may be performed in the change room, or another available outdoor surface. Football boots should not be worn on surfaces other than grass.

## CAN THE ORDER IN WHICH THE EXERCISES ARE PERFORMED BE CHANGED?

- ➔ The dynamic warm up should be performed before football training
- ➔ The football skills should be performed after the warm-up during training
- ➔ The strength exercises can be performed before, during or after training<sup>27</sup>
- ➔ The education component should be delivered in the first three weeks of using the program. Players should be reminded regularly of the purpose and benefits of the program, technique cues, and general injury prevention principles.

## IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PREP TO PLAY PROGRAM CONTACT THE RESEARCH TEAM

**Project Manager:** Dr Brooke Patterson

**Chief investigator:** Prof Kay Crossley

**Email:** [prep2play@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:prep2play@latrobe.edu.au) **Phone:** 9479 1483

**Website:** [hersport-communityfootball.latrobe.edu.au](http://hersport-communityfootball.latrobe.edu.au)

Latest research and community resources related to women's health, participation and performance in sport and exercise.

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# PREP TO PLAY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

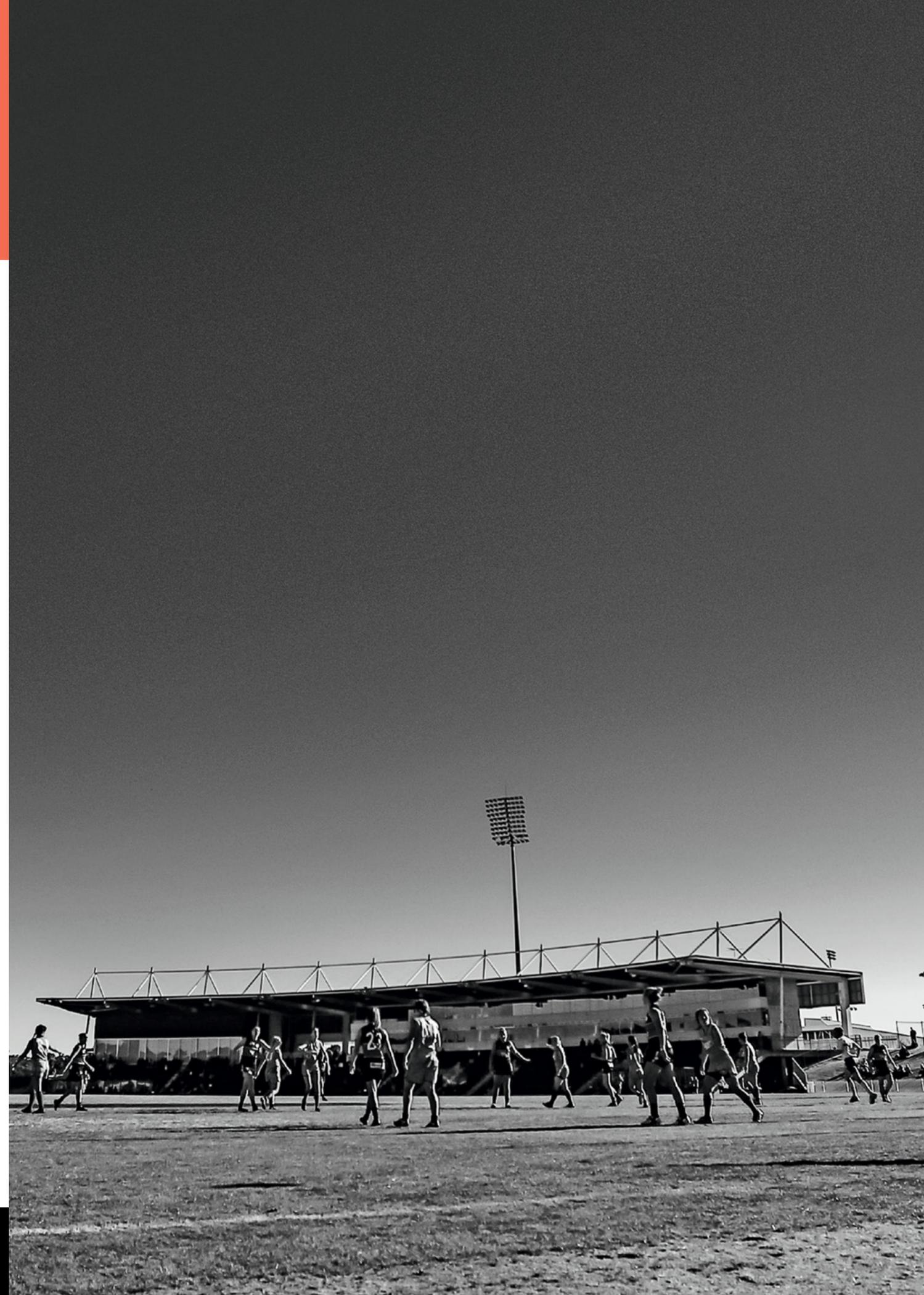


The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football.

The AFL and La Trobe University wish to thank the AFLW medical and high-performance staff, AFLW players, community coaches and players, AFLW coaches Jane Lange and Peta Searle, AFL coaches Brett Ratten and Aaron Hamill, for their contribution to the development of the Prep to Play program and associated resources.

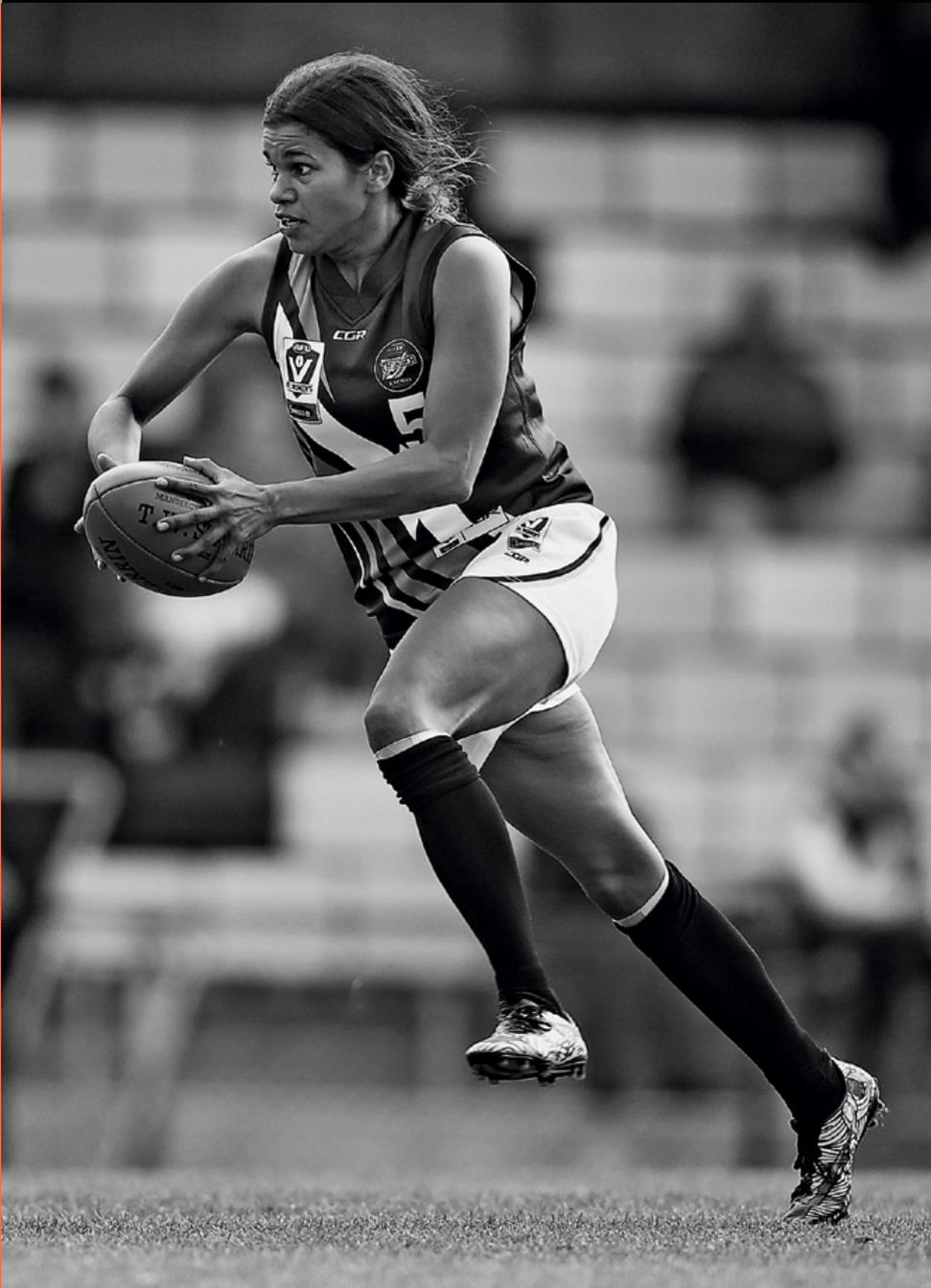
The AFL wishes to acknowledge and pay tribute to the late Danny Frawley for his contribution to the football community and for providing his expertise to the Prep To Play program. Danny was passionate about coach education and female football and his work in the Prep to Play program and football at all levels will impact footballers for years to come. Danny's passion and energy will leave a lasting legacy for all involved in our great game.

The AFL thank the research team at La Trobe University Sport and Exercise Medicine Research Centre for their contribution to the development of Prep to Play.





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Research Centre

This information was developed during a collaborative project between the AFL and La Trobe University and is informed by the best available evidence and expert opinion from coaches, players and staff.