

2026

HERALD SUN SHIELD COMPETITION HANDBOOK



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1. COMPETITION OVERVIEW

The Herald Sun Shield is Victoria's premier and longest-running school football competition, showcasing the state's top emerging football talent.

Since its inception in 1977, the Herald Sun Shield has evolved into one of the most prestigious events in school sport. In 2026, the competition will celebrate its 49th year, featuring both girls' and boys' teams representing their schools and associations.

1.1 2026 COMPETITION RANKINGS

	Rank	Intermediate Boys	Intermediate Girls	Senior Boys	Senior Girls
DIVISION 1	1	SSV	SSV	ACC	GSV
	2	APS	GISSA	SSV	APS
	3	ACC	APS	SIS	GISSA
	4	SACCSS	BAS	GISSA	SSV
	5	AGSV	GSV	SACCSS	BAS
DIVISION 2	1	BAS	SIS	BAS	CGSAV
	2	GISSA	AGSV	EISM	CSEN
	3	SIS	EISM	ACS	EISM
	4	SEISA	CGSAV	CSEN	SIS
	5	EISM	SACCSS	ICCES	SEISA
	6	ICCES	ICCES	SEISA	SACCSS
	7	CSEN	CSEN		ICCES
	8				AGSV

KEY

DIVISION 1

DIVISION 1
(PLAY IN)

DIVISION 2
(POOL A)

DIVISION 2
(POOL B)

Division 1

- a. Teams ranked 1-3 gain automatic qualification for Division 1
- b. Teams ranked 4-5 play off to gain qualification for Division 1
- c. Losing association from Play off game will be placed in Division 2 (Rank 1) for following season

Division 2

- a. Teams ranked 1, 3, 5 & 7 (if applicable) will be placed in Pool A
- b. Teams ranked 2, 4, 6 & 8 (if applicable) will be placed in Pool B

Division 2 rankings are determined by AFL Victoria based on previous results.

1.2 SELECTION & PROGRESSION

Each School Sport Association invites the premiership-winning school from their competition to represent them in the Herald Sun Shield, entering the appropriate division outlined in the table above. If the premiership-winning school is unavailable, another school from the association may take its place.

Additionally, School Associations with smaller member schools can request to field teams with students from multiple aligned member schools. Requests can be made via email to the Nines and School Competitions Lead to ensure fair competition and adequate team representation.

1.3 COMPETITION RULES AND REGULATIONS

- a) All matches in the Herald Sun Shield are subject to the arrangements and conditions of participation contained herein, in addition to the included Rules and Regulations of the Australian Football League (AFL) and determinations from time to time by AFL.
- b) The Herald Sun Shield Rules and Regulations are to be read in conjunction with the Laws of Australian Football, National Football Policy Handbook and AFL policies.

1.4 PLAYER REGISTRATION

- a) All players must be registered via the Competition Management Platform - PlayHQ to participate for a School competing in the Herald Sun Shield.
- b) Each player registration must be submitted electronically via the Competition Management Platform - PlayHQ by the player or, where the player is an underage player, by that player's parent or legal guardian.
- c) If a player has been found to not have registered via PlayHQ and has participated in any Herald Sun Shield scheduled matches, penalties will apply and will be issued directly to the school at the discretion of AFL Victoria.

1.5 TEAM SHEETS

School team sheets must be lodged via PlayHQ and shall:

- a) List the names and numbers of the Players in the Team;
- b) Identify the Interchange Players; and
- c) Identify the captain and vice-captain (where applicable).

1.6 COMPLETING AND LODGING TEAM SHEETS

- a) Division 1: Team sheets must be submitted 72 hours prior to the match commencing. Any changes during the rounds must be provided to AFL Victoria prior to the match commencing.
- b) Division 2: Team sheets must be submitted 72 hours prior to the first match commencing. Any changes during the rounds must be provided to AFL Victoria prior to the match commencing.

1.7 AGE AND STATUS OF PLAYERS

- a) The Senior Divisions will be limited to registered full-time secondary students from Year 11 and 12 who are under 20 years of age on 1st January in the competition season.
 - i. Year 10 students are eligible to play in senior divisions without requiring approval from AFL Victoria.
 - ii. Players below Year 10, must submit an 'Underage Application to Play Up' to AFL Victoria prior to the competition in order to be considered.
- b) The Intermediate Divisions will be limited to registered full-time secondary students from Year 9 and 10, who are under 18 years of age as of January 1st in the competition season.
 - i. Year 8 students are also eligible to participate without requiring AFL Victoria approval.
 - ii. Players below Year 7 must submit an 'Underage Application to Play Up' to AFL Victoria prior to the competition in order to be considered.
- c) Under no circumstances will players be permitted to represent their school team in more than one (1) competition division of the Herald Sun Shield within the same competition year.
 - i. E.g. If a school is represented across two divisions, such as Intermediate Girls & Senior Girls, a player is unable to play for both divisions. The player and school MUST ensure that the player is only represented in one division for the entirety of the Herald Sun Shield competition.

1.8 TEAMS AND PLAYERS

- a) Boys - Division 1
 - i. Each team will consist of eighteen (18) players and six (6) interchange players.
- b) Boys - Division 2
 - i. Each team will consist of eighteen (18) players and six (6) interchange players.
 - ii. Teams can consist of thirty (30) player squads, but only eighteen (18) players and six (6) interchange players can participate in each individual game.
- c) Boys - Division 2 (Grand Final)
 - i. Each team will consist of eighteen (18) players and six (6) interchange players.
- d) Girls - Division 1
 - i. Each team will consist of sixteen (16) players and eight (8) interchange players.
- e) Girls - Division 2
 - i. Each team will consist of sixteen (16) players and eight (8) interchange players.
 - ii. Teams can consist of thirty (30) player squads, but only eight (16) players and six (8) interchange players can participate in each individual game.
- f) Girls - Division 2 (Grand Final)
 - i. Each team will consist of sixteen (16) players and eight (8) interchange players.

1.9 DURATION OF MATCHES AND INTERVALS

- a) Division 1

- i. 4 x twenty-minute (20) quarters with the following breaks;
 - 1/4 time – 5 minutes
 - 1/2 time – 15 minutes
 - 3/4 time – 5 minutes
- b) Division 2
 - i. 2 x fifteen-minute (15) halves with the following breaks;
 - 1/2 time - 5 minutes
- c) Division 2 - Grand Finals
 - i. 4 x twenty-minute (20) quarters with the following breaks;
 - 1/4 time – 5 minutes
 - 1/2 time – 15 minutes
 - 3/4 time – 5 minutes

2. EXTRA TIME

- a) Division 1
 - i. Should the scores be tied at the 20-minute mark of the fourth quarter, 2 x 5 minutes halves will be played with a 2-minute break at half time. Should the scores be tied at the conclusion of the time on, the siren will not sound, and a 10-minute golden point period will be implemented.
- b) Division 2
 - i. Should the scores be tied at the end of the 15-minute mark of the second half in the division 2 round-robin format then the final siren will sound, and the game will be declared a draw.
 - ii. In the event of a draw during a final, two extra halves will be played, each lasting 3 minutes with no time on. Should the scores be tied at the conclusion of the time on, the siren will not sound, and a 10-minute golden point period will be implemented.

2.1 EQUIPMENT

- a) Football Sizes:
 - i. Footballs will be supplied by AFL Victoria for all official Herald Sun Shield Matches.
 - ii. All Herald Sun Shield boys' matches will be played with a Size 5 leather match ball.
 - iii. All Herald Sun Shield girls' matches will be played with a Size 4 leather match ball.
- b) AFL Victoria will supply all additional equipment required to facilitate matches (e.g. goal post padding).
- c) Schools are required to bring their own equipment such as warm up footballs, pumps, coaching boards, foam rollers and any additional equipment needs.

2.2 LAWS OF THE GAME

The Herald Sun Shield abides to the Laws of the Game when it comes to umpiring. To find out further laws of Australian Football, please visit the Laws of Australian Football found

<https://play.afl/sites/default/files/2026-02/Laws%20of%20Australian%20Football%202026.pdf>.

The Herald Sun Shield, however, will follow the below rule differences that differ from the laws of Australian Football for the entirety of the Herald Sun Shield:

Rule Differences	Division 1	Division 2
Last disposal OOB free kick between the 50m arcs	Yes	Yes
Field Umpire to ball the ball up, inside the 50m arcs	N/A	Yes
Boundary Umpire to come in 10m for all throw ins	Yes	N/A

Player movement on the mark (stand rule) to apply	Yes	Yes
Player on the mark at kick ins – 15 from top of goal square	Yes	Yes

2.3 SEND-OFFS

a) Yellow Card

- i. The Umpire has the power to send off any player for a non-reportable indiscretion. The umpire must show a yellow card, signaling that the player is to be sent off for 15 minutes of playing time. The player can be replaced at the interchange. Timekeepers are responsible for estimating when the 15 minutes have elapsed.
- ii. Upon the same player being sent off a second time in the same game, they will be reported and remain off the field for the entire game and must not be replaced.

b) Red Card

- i. For reportable indiscretions, the Umpire will report the offending player who is to be sent off for the remainder of the game and must not be replaced. The umpire must show a red card, signaling that the player is reported and is not to be replaced.
- ii. In these instances, the Umpire must complete the 'Notice of Report Form' regarding the incident. The Umpire's report must be forwarded to AFL Victoria's Nines & Schools Competitions Lead who will forward details of any such report to the principal at the school of the player concerned and to the School Association Executive Officer.

2.4 SUSPENDED COMMUNITY PLAYERS

Any player under suspension in any AFL competition or affiliated league will not be eligible to participate in the Herald Sun Shield.

2.5 FORFEIT / ABANDONED MATCH

- a) In the event of a forfeit, the following will apply if the match can't be rescheduled OR the team is unable to be replaced:
 - i. The team against whom the forfeiting team was to play, shall be awarded the win.
 - ii. Scores will be calculated by taking the average winning score and average losing score from matches played in that division during that round and be awarded accordingly.
 - iii. If both teams forfeit the round, then it will be counted as a draw.

2.6 TIED POOLS

- a) Please note that the following information only applies to Division 2:
 - i. If two or more schools have the same number of premierships points, their positions will be determined based on percentage, with the club having the higher percentage ranked first.
 - ii. If two or more schools have the same number of premierships points and percentage, their positions will be determined based on the winner of the home & away encounter, with the winning side ranked first.
 - iii. If two or more schools have the same number of premierships points, percentage and they did not play each other or the result of their home & away match was a tie, their positions will be decided by average points scored (for) per game, with the highest average amount of points scored per game across the competition ranked first.
 - iv. If the clubs are still tied after the above considerations, their positions will be decided by a random draw conducted by AFL Victoria's Herald Sun Shield operations, with the club drawn first being placed ahead of the others.

2.7 COACHES & OFFICIALS

- a) Coaches
 - i. It is mandatory for all participating schools to have at least one coach.
 - ii. All coaches are required to have a valid working with children check managed by their school.
 - iii. Coaches must be appointed by the participating school and are the responsibility of the school.
 - iv. We highly recommend coaches wear clothing that easily identifies their position as coach.
- b) Runners
 - i. Only one Runner per team will be allowed on the ground at any given time.
 - ii. Schools are encouraged to bring one (1) Runner, however, they are not mandatory.
 - iii. Runners must not interfere with play or the officials.
 - iv. Runners cannot be within the 50m arch whilst the ball is in play.
 - v. Runners must be easily identifiable and wear a fluorescent bib or school uniform. Importantly, runners and water carriers are not to wear the same identifying colour.
- c) Water Carriers
 - i. Each school is permitted to have up to four (4) water carriers.
 - ii. Water carriers are allowed on the ground at any time to attend to a player.
 - iii. Water carriers must not interfere with players or officials.
 - iv. Water carriers must be easily identifiable and wear a fluorescent bib or school uniform. Importantly, water carriers and runners are not to wear the same identifying colour.
- d) First Aid/ Sport Trainers
 - i. AFL Victoria will provide a Level 3 First Aid Officer on site at all HSS matches in the event of an emergency. Please note that the First Aid Officer can not be used as a trainer and does not have access to tape.
 - ii. Schools can bring a First Aider or Sports Trainer at their own discretion.
- e) Umpires

AFL Victoria will appoint the following umpires:

 - i. Field Umpires
 - ii. Goal Umpires
 - iii. Boundary Umpires (only applicable to Division 1)
- f) Operations
 - i. Match managers, timekeepers and scorers will be appointed by AFL Victoria.

2.8 PLAYER UNIFORM

- a) All schools participating in the Herald Sun Shield must wear matching playing uniform, this includes:
 - i. Matching AFL Jumper
 - ii. Matching socks
 - iii. Matching shorts – all the same colour
- b) The wearing of mouth guards is highly recommended in all Herald Sun Shield matches.
- c) No player is to wear jewellery whilst participating in the Herald Sun Shield.
- d) AFL Victoria will contact all schools prior to their matches to ensure there are no jumper clashes. If there is a clash AFL Victoria will work with both schools on a solution.

2.9 DRESSING ROOMS

- a) AFL Victoria will provide access to changerooms for all competing Schools in the Herald Sun Shield. Please note that from time to time, changerooms may need to be shared with other Schools who are participating in matches running on the same day.
- b) Each team must ensure that all dressing rooms and other areas occupied by the Team prior to, during or immediately following the completion of any match are kept clean and that no blood remains on any surface, equipment, hand basin, toilet, shower, bath or other area.
- c) Schools are to complete a final sweep of changerooms post matches to clear any rubbish or debris that has been left behind by students. Please ensure that the spaces provided are treated respectfully. Any damage will be the responsibility of the competing school.
- d) It will be the school's responsibility to look after all the belongings in the change rooms provided, AFL Victoria will not take any responsibility for items in change rooms.
- e) AFL Victoria are happy to support with locking change rooms throughout the Herald Sun Shield at the request of schools.

3. BEST ON GROUND MEDAL – GRAND FINALS

A 'Best on Ground' Medal will be awarded to the player judged the best player on the field during their divisions Grand Final. This award will be decided in collaboration between AFL Victoria, the field umpires, and the commentary team.

3.1 HERALD SUN SHIELD - TEAM OF THE YEAR

The Herald Sun Shield Team of the Year will be determined for both the Senior Boys and Senior Girls Division 1 competitions. Each team will consist of 22 players selected from those who participated in the competition. The final teams will be chosen and announced by AFL Victoria post the Herald Sun Shield's completion.

3.2 MATCH FILMING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Herald Sun Shield matches will be live streamed by AFL Victoria. Please note that due to the nature of live streaming, we are unable to avoid filming particular students. AFL Victoria can advise commentary to avoid mentioning players names where required upon request. Schools will be responsible to advise AFL Victoria of any students who can't be photographed or mentioned across commentary.

3.3 COMPETITION STRUCTURE

- a) AFL Victoria shall be responsible for determining the programming of matches.
- b) AFL Victoria has the right to determine the date, time and location of the matches.
- c) AFL Victoria will endeavour, where possible, to plan matches and venues to reduce travel and timing issues.
- d) Team nominations of 24 players are due 48 hours prior to the Match, unless otherwise stated by AFL Victoria.

3.4 CODE OF CONDUCT / TEAM CONDUCT

- a) All Schools and Sporting Associations, including Coaches, Officials, Players and Supporters, that enter the AFL Victoria Herald Sun Shield Competition fully support the Local Footy Code of Conduct

HERE.

- b) Should any player, coach or official act in such a manner as to bring the competition or game into disrepute, they shall be disciplined by AFL Victoria in conjunction with the applicable schools.
- c) An AFL Victoria tribunal will be the sole arbiter in all cases and will have the authority to disqualify any school from the competition for one or more years.

3.5 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It is at the discretion of AFL Victoria to determine proceedings if any rules or regulations are not identified within this document. Please contact the Nines and School Competition Lead to discuss any rules and regulations that you may be seeking clarification on.

3.6 INSURANCE

The AFL holds Public Liability Insurance to a limit of \$20,000,000 per occurrence to cover its legal liabilities in respect of third party personal injury or property damage. The AFL expects each school participating in Australian Football programs to procure and maintain public liability insurance to sufficiently cover its own legal liabilities. At its own discretion, each school or individual may want to consider purchasing personal accident insurance providing cover for non-Medicare medical expenses arising from this Australian Football program, or any other school program.

Students participate in the Herald Sun Shield Competition at their own risk. They are responsible for their own personal injury/accident insurance.



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AND RESOURCES VISIT:**

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