

To: SMJFL Club Presidents, Secretaries and Football Departments
From: Bree Vallance, GM - Football Operations
Date: Friday 29th November 2024
Re: **SMJFL Season 2025 Football Operations Update**

In preparation for our 2025 season the SMJFL has conducted a review of the 2024 season, including reviewing our existing Football Operations processes and resourcing and considered how we might improve Club and participant experiences into SMJFL season 2025 and beyond.

We remain focussed on delivering a fair and equitable competition, regardless of age group or division, that is inclusive, safe, and fun. The intent of this communication is to share essential information ahead of 2025 and includes information, or requests for information, on:

1. Request for your Club's Primary Football Contact(s)
2. PlayHQ registration process and service fee
3. SMJFL Season 2025 Season Dates
4. SMJFL 2025 Football Operations Administration Calendar
5. Club and League Football Operations Meetings
6. SMJFL Grading Committee – Club Nominations
7. Grading – Process and Guidelines
8. Fixturing, Associated Competition Administration & 2025 Age Groups
9. Night Matches
10. Team Numbers and Players – Regular Season and Finals
11. Transfers / Age Dispensations
12. Match Day Football Operations
13. Club Complaints / Discipline
14. AFL National Community Football Policy Handbook (NCFPH)

We invite you to share this information with your Club committees. Please read the entire memo before actioning. Note: The memo includes links to three (3) JotForm's:

- [JotForm 1 link here](#): **Your Club's Primary Football Contact(s)**
- [JotForm 2 link here](#): **U17.5 Boys Over Age Exemption Applications**
- [JotForm 3 link here](#): **Age Dispensation Applications**

If at any time you have questions relating to the information provided in this memo, please do not hesitate to contact us via email at: gmfootball@smjfl.com.au copying footballadmin@smjfl.com.au

Thank you

Bree Vallance
GM Football Operations
SMJFL 2024

1. Request for your Clubs Primary Football Contact(s)

As per the 2024 Season the SMJFL is requesting that Clubs nominate a dedicated Football Operations contact(s) from your committee.

We are hoping that by opening our lines of communication to liaise directly with each Club's football representative(s) this will save volunteer time for your Presidents and Secretaries who are often responsible for searching for the information we need from your Club.

The Football Operations contact(s) for each Club will be shared with all 26 Clubs in the new year so that together you can also have a network. Please provide the details of your contact via the: [JotForm 1 link here](#).

2. PlayHQ registration process and service fee

We wanted to remind you that the service fee will now be implemented for local footy. It is important to highlight that the service fee being applied will not impact any funds clubs receive from registration fees.

Communication – Service Fee Implementation

- The AFL transition to PlayHQ commenced with NAB AFL Auskick in 2021 and local football in 2022 onwards. In 2024 the transition is complete with all affiliated local football leagues and clubs nationally operating on PlayHQ.
- In 2021, prior to the first community football leagues/clubs transitioning to PlayHQ, the AFL communicated that a new online fee structure would be phased in over the following three years as part of the transition to PlayHQ.
- For the 2025 season, consistent with the communication in 2021, the Service Fee of 1.8% will be implemented for all participants paying on the platform.
- The Service Fee will support the continued enhancement of platform features and capabilities to benefit all users, which includes enhancements across the PlayHQ platform.
- Collecting payments through the platform provides the opportunity to simplify accounting processes and reduce the burden on volunteers and administrators who spend valuable time chasing manual payments.
- The 1.8% Service Fee is added to the cost of a registration at the point of payment, meaning club and/or league fees are not impacted by the Service Fee

- The Service Fee will apply for local footy for the 2025 season, from Tuesday 1st October 2024.

What does the Service Fee cover?

The Service Fee will support the continued enhancement of platform features and capabilities to benefit all users on PlayHQ. In addition to this, the AFL remains committed to investing in features and enhancements specific to the needs of our users.

3. SMJFL Season 2025 Dates

The 2025 SMJFL Season dates are available via the [link here](#).

Please note the confirmed 2025 Finals Series dates will be communicated mid-way through the 2025 season and may include mid-week and/or night matches.

4. 2025 Football Operations Administration Calendar

The SMJFL Season 2025 Football Operations Calendar is attached as **Appendix A**.

5. Club and League Football Operations Meetings

We will be continuing the opportunity for Clubs to meet with the SMJFL Football Operations Department ahead of the season, with these meetings scheduled between Monday 3 February and Thursday 27 February 2025.

We ask Club Football Operations personnel to register via the link below to schedule your 60–90-minute meeting to discuss your Club's teams and grading:

[**SMJFL Club Football Operations Meeting Registration Calendar**](#)

Note: Please act promptly to secure your preferred meeting time and date. In the event Clubs have conflicts the league will work to accommodate out of hours meeting times.

6. SMJFL Grading Committee – Club Nominations

The first SMJFL Grading Meeting for the 2025 Season is scheduled for Monday 2 December 2024, from 6pm-8.30pm and will be held in the Danny Frawley Centre at RSEA Park.

All Clubs are invited to nominate one (1) representative (JotForm already communicated previously – [link here](#)) to attend the Grading meetings on behalf of your Club. This person must be:

- Available on the below dates (see schedule in Table 1 below) and
- Able to make decisions on behalf of your Club and contribute to round table discussions.

MEETING #	DATE	TIME	VENUE
1	Mon 2 December, 2024	6pm - 8:30pm	Danny Frawley Centre
2	Mon 17 March, 2025	6pm - 8pm	TBC
3	Mon 19 May 2025	6pm - 9pm	TBC

Table 1: Schedule of SMJFL Grading Meetings in the lead up to the 2025 Competition

7. Grading – Process and Guidelines

On Monday, 2 December 2024 the Grading Committee, will be presented with an in-depth analysis of the 2024 Season and the proposed gradings for 2025.

Data drives decision making, and the analysis that has been prepared in conjunction with external partners provides greater transparency and insights across all 26 of our Member Clubs. This analysis includes:

- The Home and Away balance for each Club and
- Results from the 2024 Season, which will in turn assist in reviewing divisions where grading “did not work.”

8. Fixturing, Associated Competition Administration & 2025 Age Groups

An important consideration in fixturing continues to be ground availability and while the league endeavours to accommodate Club requests there are often constraints across the 70 venues and 6 LGA’ s (and Parks Victoria) as it relates to fixturing, just one example being existing or planned capital works projects for the calendar year ahead.

Where grounds are unavailable due to capital works or while facilities are being used for other activities (i.e., the Grand Prix), this has the dual impact of both limiting a Club's ability to utilise their own facility and at the same time challenging the league to fixture a fair and equitable (balanced home and away) competition.

The SMJFL works diligently to maintain strong working relationships with our LGA's and in conjunction with our planned pre-season Club meetings, determine our best approach to fixturing. It is essential that Clubs provide timely and accurate information as it relates to their home facilities.

8.1 Draft 2025 Fixture Release Schedule

With a focus on delivering a fair and equitable competition and a balanced home and away fixture, fixtures will be published via PlayHQ in full and final form as per the Fixture Release schedule (see Table 2 below):

ROUNDS	WHEN
1-2	Release April 4th
3-4	Wednesday prior to Round 3
FINAL Re-Grade - Monday 19th May	
5-9	Week prior to Round 5
10-15	Friday, 14 June 2024

Table 2: Schedule of Fixture Release for the 2025 Season.

8.2 Team names in 2025

Critical to the success of the revised fixturing process is the consistent naming of teams. This was implemented in 2024 and requires that **ALL Clubs adopt the same format for team names** as follows:

Team name format:

Club name – Age group – Division – **Coach's name OR Club Colour OR Club Nickname**

For example:

- Bentleigh U14 Mixed **BROADBENT**
- Bentleigh U14 Mixed **RED**
- Bentleigh U14 Mixed **DEMONS**

Clubs will be sent a **Team Entry Spreadsheet** to complete following your Club Football Operations Meeting, asking you to confirm team names for each of your teams by Friday, 7 March 2025.

We ask that Clubs **DO NOT ADD TEAMS THEMSELVES ON PLAYHQ OR USE THE TEAM ROLLOVER FUNCTION** - the SMJFL Football Operations team has an internal naming convention included in the team name to assist analysing teams over multiple years, therefore the SMJFL will add / update these into PlayHQ as team entries are received.

Please note that the Football Operations Department will commence the fixturing process from Tuesday, 11 March and no late teams will be accepted.

Note: the reasoning behind the naming convention will be explained in greater depth at the SMJFL Grading Meeting of 2 December.

8.3 Merged Sides – MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) 2025

SMJFL Merged Teams Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Overview

SMJFL clubs are encouraged to work with each other to enter teams into SMJFL competitions when they do not have enough players:

- a) in an age group to make up a team on their own; or
- b) for multiple teams in an age group meaning a number of players are playing in a division that is not suitable for their ability.

Clubs may decide to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):

- a) longer-term so parents and players are aware of the pathway before they join the club e.g. *Club A & Club B field their own teams until U12 then enter merged teams from U13+*
- b) yearly on a needs basis e.g. *Club C looks like they will only have enough players for 1.5 teams the following season then joins up with Club D who only has enough for .5 of a team.*

The SMJFL's Merged Teams Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Template can be found [here](#)

9. Night Matches

In 2025 we are looking forward to having Night Matches as a regular occurrence in our home and away fixture.

At the League / Club Football Operations meetings in February all Clubs will be asked to advise which of their teams, if any, are interested in playing night matches. The SMJFL will then fixture night matches into the Season schedule.

10. Team Numbers and Players – Regular Season and in Finals

The SMJFL Bylaw Review is currently underway and includes a review of **SMJFL Bylaw Clause 14 Number of Players** for modified competitions, in particular U8 Mixed. Club feedback is critical. And we ask that you please review the proposed changes in the latest Bylaws Review which will be circulated to Clubs from Monday 2 December 2024, if you are unable to find the information, please contact the SMJFL.

11. Transfers / Age Dispensations

The AFL has re-opened the November Transfer Period for the upcoming season, closing 30 November. **The National Transfer Period will re-open on Saturday 1 February 2025.**

The U17.5 Boys Over Age Exemption applications are open via [JotForm 2 link here](#). Please Note: the SMJFL reviews Age Dispensations in accordance with AFL guidelines and SMJFL Bylaw 7.3.1

Please [click here](#) to read the latest National Age Dispensation Policy from the AFL.

All other Age Dispensation applications will be available from Monday 3rd February via the [JotForm 3 link here](#).

The outcome of all applications will be communicated via your SMJFL Club Secretary. Please allow up to 10 working days for a response.

12. Match Day Football Operations

We acknowledge that the 2024 preseason brought new learnings for Club Volunteers and League alike as we adopted the PlayHQ Competition Management Platform. As we transition to a paperless system in 2024, we have some further important reminders related to Match Day operations:

14.1 Participating Players

It remains the responsibility of Team Managers to confirm all players present, however as this will be online the need for player signatures will no longer be required.

14.2 Entering Results – Live Scoring

The ability for all scores to be entered at the completion of the game (via the competition management platform) or for live scoring to be active, will reduce the amount of time the Team Managers are required to spend after a game entering results etc.

14.3 Match Day Paperwork

As we move to a paperless system:

Team Sheets move to being online only. There will be resources, and an online training video released for Team Managers closer to our Season start date

Umpires retain the ability to enter all Reports, Yellow or Red Cards or other incidents and notes from the game online via Officials HQ as in 2025

12.1. Volunteer Support

The SMJFL will provide resources and online training sessions from PlayHQ as available.

NOTE: All the above can be managed from a mobile phone.

13. Club Complaints / Discipline

Feedback suggests that the updated process for the consistent collection of complaint information from Clubs via JotForm (in 2024) worked well and will be continued for the 2025 season.

An information session and step-by-step walk through of the Club Complaint process will be delivered for Club personnel involved in Football Operations at the SMJFL Club Conference on Sunday 23 March 2025. Further information will be communicated once the Club Conference planning is finalised (early February 2025).

14. AFL National Community Football Policy Handbook

Following a review in 2024 and as an affiliate of AFL Victoria, the SMJFL has confirmed its adoption of the majority of policies contained within the AFL National Community

Football Policy Handbook (NCFPH) a copy of which is attached with this communication.