



**FERNTREE GULLY EAGLES JUNIOR FOOTBALL CLUB
PLAYING OUT OF AGE GROUP
POLICY POSITION
MARCH 2009**

PURPOSE:

To consider the issues arising out of the current 'Playing Out Of Your Age Group Policy' and provide a recommended way forward.

BACKGROUND:

In August 2006, the Junior Club's then Coaching Co-ordinator presented a written report to the General Committee of the discussions at the Coaches meeting held on 14 August 2006. This report was requested by the then Executive.

The report predominantly addressed the question of whether or not players should play in their correct age group; it also reported on the grading of players if there is more than one team in that age group. (A copy of that report is attached.)

Following further discussion and debate, it was decided at the General Committee meeting in November 2006 to enforce By-Laws # 3 and # 4 of the *Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club* Constitution. These By-Laws state:

***By-Law #3:** "All players shall play in their correct age group, unless a request is made to the Executive Committee.*

***By-Law #4:** "Players who wish to play in a higher age group for the season must request a meeting with the Executive Committee within two (2) weeks of the season commencing. The meeting will be conducted in the presence of one (1) or both parents. Such players seeking permission shall abide by the determination of the Executive Committee and the League By-Laws in respect to under age players."*

The EFL By-Laws have a section titled "Playing out of age group" and refers to Law Number 18.30 on page 36 of that document. It states that:

By-Law 18.30:

(A): "All players in the under 9 to under 16 grades (inclusive) may play out of their registered age group. However, no player may:

- 1. Play more than two (2) games out of his/her registered age group in any one season;*
- 2. Play more than two years (grades) above his/her registered age group;*
- 3. The first team a player plays his third (3) matches in is the only team they can qualify for finals in. Once a player has qualified in a division they are limited to two (2) matches in a higher division. They cannot move down to a lower division.*

(B): Where a club fields more than one (1) team in the same competitive age group up to under 16's, a player is permitted to move between teams, but once they have played three (3) matches for one particular team, that player is ineligible to move to the other team for the remainder of the season. Where a bye is fixtured in the higher graded team, no player is permitted to move from the higher graded team to the lower graded team. (i.e: from one division tem to the other) during the week of the bye.

(C): In circumstances where 18 eligible players will not be available to take the field in a nominated under age match, the League CEO may at his absolute discretion grant a permit to play for player/s for the nominated match only. A request for such a permit must be supported by a statutory declaration stating that 18 eligible players are not available for the match."

OUR EXPERIENCES:

In late 2006, criteria were established as parameters to assist the Executive in the determination of any application received under the Club's By-Law # 3 and # 4. It was also decided that three (3) of the five (5) criteria set had to be met to approve any application. The criteria established were:

1. Same school grade as player is wanting to play with
2. Already playing in the team
3. Age/Ability/Coaches recommendation
4. Other: Practicality; can't get to 9's and 10's at the same time; parental reasons;
5. Making up team player numbers

Since 2006, the Club has received several applications – all have been approved; none have been disallowed.

In 2007, the club approved the following:

- 3 under 9's to play in under 10's
- 1 under 11 to play in the under 12's
- 2 under 13 to play in the under 14's

In 2008, the club has received the following applications:

- 2 under 9's to play in the under 10's (with a third possibly...)
- 3 under 10's to play in the under 11's
- 1 under 12 to play in the under 13's
- 3 under 14's to play in the under 15's

ISSUES:

Discussion in the Executive when deliberating the 2008 applications resulted in more questions than answers. The key issues identified by the current Executive Committee include:

- The current criteria are **all** inclusive.
- There have been no applications rejected or not approved to date.
- It remains unclear as to what the players may have been told in previous years and the promises / commitments made.

SITUATION IN 2008/2009:

Decisions also need to be practical to overcome the current obstacles. The current situation necessitates that other factors need to be considered including the length of time (years) that a player has played out of their age group.

For example, two (2) of the older age players wishing to play out of their age group in season 2008 have been playing in this fashion for a period of three (3) to four (4) years in one example and five (5) + years in the other. To force these players to return to their correct age group now - close to the end of their junior football career - would seem harsh. Nevertheless, the benefits of playing in their correct age group should be highlighted and discussed with their parents.

Further, the Club has received many registrations of players to play at the *Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club* in season 2008. This has resulted in teams being full and unable to manage any further players. On the other hand, there are not enough players to create a second team.

For example, the Under 9's in season 2008 currently have 24 registrations. The ideal is to have 20 (possibly 21) so that only 5 (or 6) sit on the bench. The Executive is aware that there are two (2) to three (3) players in the under 9's who have requested to play in the Under 10's. The Under 10's have capacity to take on these players with each of the under 10 teams currently having 18 to 20 players each.

The Under 12's in season 2008 are also full. The Executive is aware of one (1) player who has applied to play out of his age group in the Under 13's. We could enforce the rule which will require this player to play under 12's – however the under 12's currently have 24 or 25 registrations – this will mean that the under 12's will need to ask one of their players to leave the team and club.

The Under 14's in season 2008 are also full. The Executive is aware of three (3) players who wish to play in the under 15's – two (2) of these players are long-time players at the club. The options are to force these two players to return to the Under 14's – who in turn then need to ask two new players to leave the club as that team is already full; or the Club allows the players to play out of their age group in the Under 15's.

DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS IN 2008 WHO'S CHILDREN PLAYED OUT OF THEIR AGE GROUP:

Parents have cited the restrictive nature of the current policy and have highlighted the following factors:

- One child was born the 2 January; another on 20 January and in the strict letter of the Policy these children would miss out on the cut-off date by 2 and 20 days respectively.
- This child wishes to play with his friends from school all of whom are in the same year. The current policy would prevent these children from playing with their friends.
- A belief that the cut-off date should coincide with the school cut-off dates (ie: A DOB being April). If the cut-off was made to be the same as the school year cut-off then this would seem a more appropriate rule. By doing so, then children will

be competing with and against other children in their school year; and playing with their friends from school.

- Children want to play football with their friends/mates with whom they socialise at school. Some children would feel excluded if they were forced to return to a lower age group and could as such relinquish football altogether.
- Parents generally agree with the intent of the policy and the constitution but find it restrictive in the case of some children and therefore have a negative effect on those children.
- There are some logistical issues whereby two children play at the same time and therefore will probably miss out as a result of parents' inability to transport child to game. This is particularly the case in the younger age groups whereby parents also wish to be present as their child plays at the game for health and safety reasons. This is considered to be a short-term issue as it resolves itself as the child grows older.
- Parents also expressed dissatisfaction with needing to write to the Executive each year to apply for approval for their child to play outside of his age group.

Given the above, and the fact that there would be a small percentage of children playing that are effected by this policy, it is important that the club put the issues in writing to review our experiences to date in order to make decisions in relation to the applications for season 2009 and beyond; and to find a way to move forward into the future.

A WAY FORWARD:

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

First and foremost, it is recommend that the Executive endorses the position of the Junior Football Club in ensuring players play in their correct age groups. The reasons for this need to be articulated with parents – and these reasons include issues of development, safety, etc.

This approach is consistent with the Coaches Meeting of the 14 August 2006, where it was recommended that the Club:

“...introduce playing in their correct age group from the Under 9’s. This recommendation is to be across the board unless there is extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances needs to be clarified – Not enough players in the above age group and they are capable of playing up (this is to be discussed between the relevant coaches and parents).”

However, the ‘one size fits all’ approach would seem restrictive particularly given that this is a sporting and social environment and the club objective is to encourage local children playing local football. Therefore, it is believed that there is a need to re-consider or more clearly define the ‘extenuating circumstances’ to better reflect the intent and purpose of the policy.

It is recommended that, if a request is made to the Executive Committee, the Executive Committee will assess the request using the following evaluation criteria:

1. **Team numbers.** In order for a player to play in a higher age group, there must be a vacancy on the higher age group's player list and their correct age group must not be left with insufficient players.
2. **If two children are listed to play in one age group (one child being younger in age; the other child being in the correct age group), the child in the correct age group will have precedence for registration in that age group.**
3. **Discussion with the coach or coaches familiar with the player's ability.**
4. **The school year cut off dates and friendship groups. (ie: The school year calendar is used as a guide in some cases).**
5. **History of the player playing out of age.**
6. **The Club may decide it is necessary for a child to play in a higher age group as a means of balancing team player numbers. (ie: Not enough players in the above age group and/or too many players in the lower age group.)**
7. **Parent's/Guardian's agreement for their child to play in a higher age group must be sought.**

This will allow parents / guardians of their child to make a more informed decision within the parameters of the club. It actively involves parents in the decision making for their child. It also removes the restrictive nature of the original policy where a one size fits all approach may not be applicable. It is believed that this change will meet the needs of all involved including the player, the parents and the club.

Should the Executive Committee approve a player to play outside of their age group, the player's Parents / Guardians written agreement is required. In all situations, the Club Policy is to be discussed with the parents so that an understanding is achieved in the reasons behind the policy. Parents are to be made aware of the (potential) disadvantages in their child playing out of their age group as identified in this document. (Please refer to the Coaches Meeting of 14 August 2006.)

SUMMARY:

The Club endorses the position of children playing in their correct age group.

The Club also accepts that this position can be too restrictive in some situations and endorses the criteria as outlined above in which to base a registration decision.

**Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club
General Committee
March 2009**



Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club

ABN 95 746 502 322

P. O. BOX 288, BORONIA VIC 3155

Date: ...

Dear

Thank you for your request about your child playing out of his/her age group.

The Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club Executive has considered this request and has approved the application.

This means that will play in the under for season 200_.

The Executive will arrange to meet with you during the course of this season to further discuss the Club Policy on “Playing Out of your age group”; how your child is coping; and the options for season 200_. It will also allow the Executive to better understand the issues from your perspective.

In the meantime, could you please complete the section below and return it to your son’s Coach.

Yours sincerely,

Executive Committee
**Ferntree Gully Eagles
Junior Football Club**

I/We (please print name) agree for our child

(please print name) to play in the Under ... in season 200_.

Signed: and

PICKETT RESERVE, Cnr BURWOOD HIGHWAY & COMMERCIAL ROAD, FERNTREE GULLY VIC 3156.

PHONE: 9758 8001

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