

ANZA Soccer

Pitch Time Guidelines For Competition Teams' Players

Foundation Guideline for ANZA Soccer

ANZA Soccer's Coaches' Code of Conduct spells out that coaches 'will ensure that every player plays at least half the game'. Our [ANZA Soccer Code of Conduct](#) is a foundation document for ANZA Soccer's programmes and is shared with the public [on our website](#), under Rules and Policies.

Expectations for Saturday Club League – Pitch time

For our Saturday Club League this rule is to be upheld strictly and without exceptions. Any excuse for not complying because 'a player is the weakest in the team' isn't valid. Our Saturday Club League is a 'mixed abilities' league and teams are balanced by the Age Group Coordinators (AGCs) at the start of the season. Each team will have stronger and weaker players, and as long as all coaches adhere to the 'minimum 50% pitch time' rule for each game, no team or coach can gain a regular advantage by underplaying the weakest players. By making the policy public, all players, parents, and coaches may be aware of expectations and can help ensure fair treatment across teams in each age group.

Objectives for Sunday Competition Teams

Our Sunday Competition Teams' objectives are to promote the values of community, healthy competition, player development, positive coaching, good sportsmanship, passion for the game, and respect for teammates, coaches, opponents, and referees. We aim to teach the children to love soccer, to develop a strong sense of teamwork and community, to grow confidence in oneself, and to do so while having fun with both new and old friends.

Our Sunday Competition Teams are not playing in a 'mixed abilities' league. Trials are held in the second half of August to select the best players for the squad (if only one team is registered for an age group) or to select players for multiple (two or three) squads based on skills and positional requirements, with the strongest players playing in the first team (Socceroos for boys and Matildas Sky Blue for girls) and the next strongest in the second team (Gold). The remaining players are selected for any third team (Green). If there is no place for a player in any squad for the upcoming season at the end of the trials, the parent and player are informed and the parents receive a full refund of competition team fees.

When deciding on the appropriate squad size for teams, CTCs should factor in the format of the league for the respective team (eg 7v7), the pitch time guidelines and the age group.

Recommended target/max squad sizes are 7/8 for 5v5, 10/11 for 7v7, 12/13 for 9v9 and 17/21 for 11v11, the latter depending on age group (the older the more other/school commitments) and level of competition/duration of matches (2x25 minutes/2x 35 minutes/2x 45 minutes).

Expectations for Sunday Competition Teams – Pitch time

The spirit of 'minimum 50% pitch time' is also to be upheld for our Competition Teams playing in external leagues and tournaments. Where our teams play in leagues organised by JSSL and LCS, coaches should ensure that:

1. **For Boys teams playing at the third level or below, i.e., any team playing Div 3 or below in the JSSL Singapore National Youth League from B7 to B10 and Div 2 or below from B11 to B16, and for Girls team playing in Division 2, referred to as 'low competitive level' hereafter:** Every player plays at least half the game *for each game*. The same applies to any team playing in any ESPZEN J-League, as we typically play our age groups' weakest teams in that league.
2. **For teams playing at the highest or second-highest level (Div 1 or 2 for B7 to B10; PYCL or Div 1 for B11 to B17; Division 1 for Girls teams), referred to as 'high competitive level' hereafter:** The spirit of 'minimum 50% pitch time' should be maintained, but the coaches may opt to apply this *on average* across a (7 to 10 matches) season for those matches that the player is available, i.e., not for every game. This gives coaches some flexibility to play the one to two weakest players less than 50% against the strongest opponents, as long as this is compensated by playing them more than 50% in other matches. It's important, though, that each player still gets meaningful (at least 30%) pitch time even in matches against stronger opponents.

The above describes general principles for Competition Teams, depending on division level.

Exceptions for Competition League Matches – Pitch time

There are some possible exceptions for Competition Teams in certain circumstances which are allowed when necessary, but it is important that coaches aim to stick to the general principle as much as possible and communicate clearly to parents and players in situations where an exception is being applied:

1. **Critical matches** (low and high competitive level): Critical matches are one of the following:
 - a. The last two matches in a season IF the result directly impacts promotion / relegation / play-off and the strength of the opponent suggests a tight match
 - b. Earlier match in the season ONLY in case the opponent is the only other direct contender for promotion / relegation

The reason for these exceptions is that the team benefits from playing at the highest level at which they can be competitive. Getting promoted or avoiding relegation also plays a role in player retention. Coaches should communicate to both parents and players when and why an exception is made.

2. **Unfit player** (low and high competitive level): Unfit players are those who have not trained nor played for a prolonged time and/or who are coming back from an injury.
 - a. The coach may decide to ease the player back into regular play in the first game that he/she is back by specially managing the player's pitch time.
 - b. The coach should inform the player and parent, at minimum by flagging the player as 'manage pitch time' in the roll call.

3. Player selected who is not yet at required level (high competitive level only): This refers to a situation where the number of available players to play at the high competitive level of the league is lower than the minimum squad size and the coach needs to compromise by selecting a player who has the potential to achieve the required level but isn't there yet.
 - a. It is important in this situation to communicate with both the parent and the player that the player will need development before his/her pitch time will reach at least 50%. The player should attend training regularly to improve. The intention and potential is to develop the player into a regular squad member within the current 7 to 10 match season.
 - b. If by the next league season the player has not sufficiently improved, he should be demoted (if there is a second team) or asked to withdraw from Sunday competition teams. If he stays in the team, he will no longer fall under this exception.

4. Too-large match-day squad (high competitive level only): Especially for the older age groups, in order to have enough players every week (usually at least 15 for an 11-a-side league) the overall squad size can be as high as 20 players. Most matches, only 14 to 17 will be available, but sometimes almost the whole squad is there. When playing at a high competitive level, it may then not be feasible to give all players 50% pitch time without severely compromising the team's performance. In the PYCL there are also restrictions on how often substitutions may be made.
 - a. It is important to communicate to the players and parents prior to the match in case the coach expects a too-large squad to impact players' pitch time.
 - b. Some players in these age groups may even choose to opt out of a match if they expect to be one who will get the least pitch time.

Exceptions for Tournaments

There are some possible exceptions which can be made for tournaments, but it is important that coaches aim to stick to the general principle as much as possible and communicate clearly to parents and players in situations where an exception is applied.

In 7-a-side tournaments where you may have a tournament squad of 11 to 12 players and matches are short, it becomes very difficult to stick to minimum 50% pitch time *per game*. Therefore, regardless of the level of competitiveness of the team, it is acceptable instead to aim for such a minimum *on average across the group matches*. Coaches should try to assess before (and during) the tournament the strength of the opponents, so they can best judge when to play their strongest players more, and when to give more pitch time to weaker players.

There are two other possible exceptions to the general principle which can be made during tournaments, but it is important that coaches aim to stick to the general principle as much as possible and communicate clearly to parents/players in situations where an exception is applied.

1. Knockout stage (especially if in Cup with a chance to make the Final): In the knock-out stage, coaches are free to decide on pitch time only based on maximising the team's probability to progress as far as possible, especially if the team has the capability to reach/win the Cup Final. It's also in the interest of the entire team not to be knocked out early.
 - a. It is important for coaches to communicate their approach to pitch time in both group stage and knockout stage prior to the tournament.
 - b. They should keep in mind that if they overplay their best players in the group stage and early knockout matches, their weaker players may be needed to replace them in the later stage of the knockout matches.
2. Contingency player (Singapore tournaments): There could be a situation when a coach adds a player only as a contingency player to the tournament squad (e.g., an extra goalie or utility player). This player will only come in in case of injuries before or during the tournament.
 - a. It is important that the coach carefully manages the player's expectations regarding any play time.
 - b. If attending purely as a contingency player, the player should not be charged tournament fees.
 - c. If the player replaces an injured player *before* the tournament, they should register/pay and the injured player should be refunded.

—Drafted by Marcel de Bruijkere, Competition Teams Coordinator, and approved by ANZA Soccer Committee on 23 May, 2023.