



**Northern Region  
Football**

**NRF JUNIOR FOOTBALL  
HANDBOOK**

• 2025 •



## Northern Region Football

# Purpose

This handbook is designed to guide all parents, caregivers and everyone involved with junior football to help you deliver the McDonald's Junior Framework, with key details on how junior football operates within Northern Region Football.

### **Giving thanks**

Northern Region Football wholeheartedly thanks all the dedicated parents, caregivers, staff and volunteers that deliver an amazing football experience to our game's youngest players. Without you all, there would be no smiles - thank you all!



# Contents

Purpose	2
McDonald's Junior Football Framework	4
Junior Framework Principles	5
Small-Sided Games	6
Team Formation Guidelines for Clubs	7
Balance is Better	8
Good Sports	9
Northern Region Football Staff Contacts	10
Gamedays for 4-8 year olds	11-13
Gamedays for 9-12 year olds	14-16
The Retreating Line	17
Other Info	18



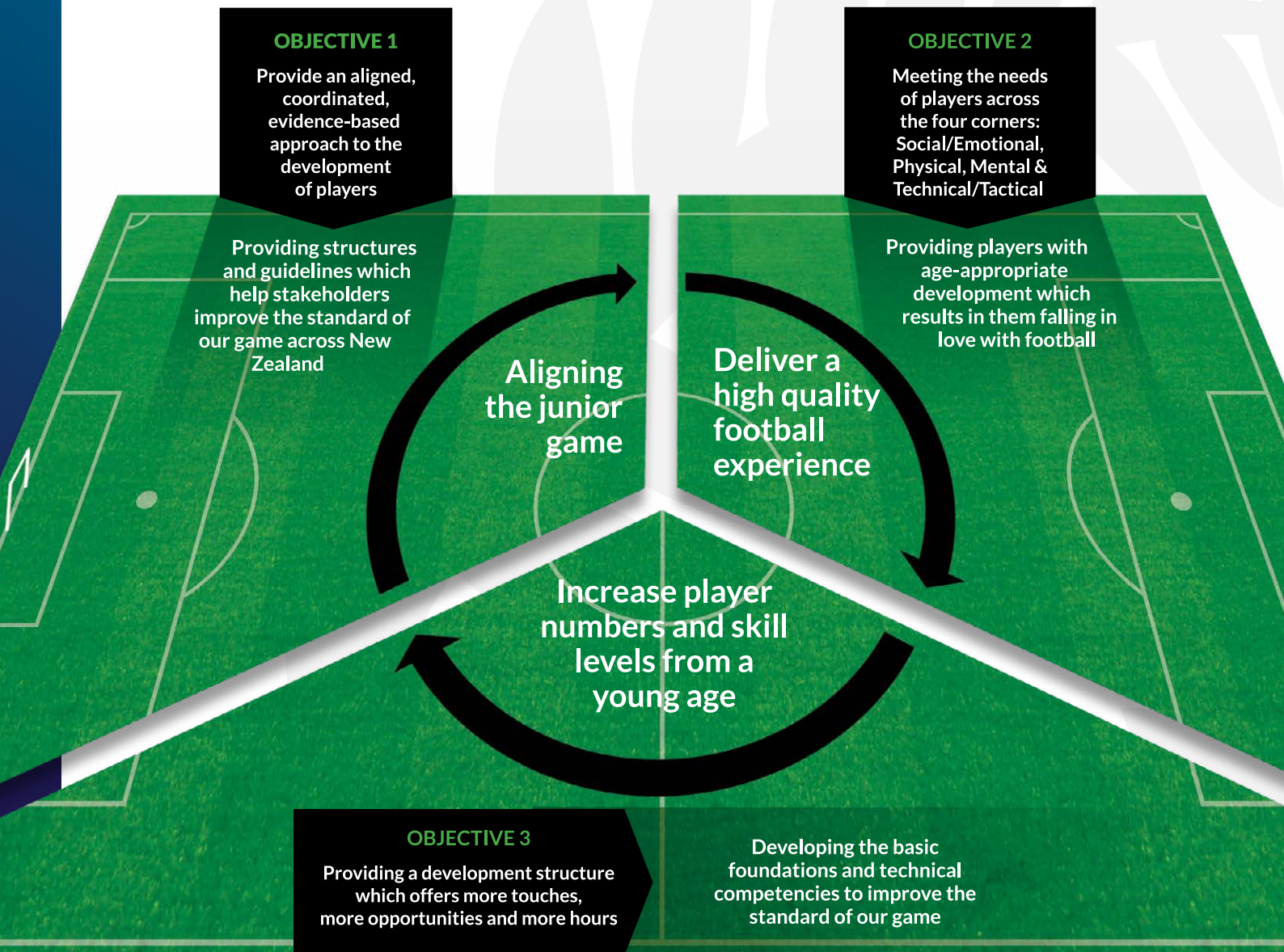


# McDonald's Junior Football Framework

McDonald's & NZ Football have teamed up to produce the McDonald's Junior Framework, which provides a consistent, coordinated national approach to the development of junior players. This provides guides for age-appropriate football games, training recommendations and standardised playing formats for each stage of a player's development.

Regardless of motivation or ability, players should enjoy a high-quality experience at all stages of their football journey. The framework aims to meet the needs of all young players.

To view the entire McDonald's NZ Football Junior Framework Document [CLICK HERE](#)





# McDonald's Junior Framework Principles

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## Accumulation of Touches

To maximise the limited time available for players to play, activities where players each have a ball and small-sided games ensuring that players touch the ball as much as possible to build their technical ability.

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## Early Engagement

Emphasis on quality of experience to develop lifelong participation.

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## Recognising Development Age

Allow each player equal opportunity to reach their potential by catering for the individual needs of each player.

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## Developing Physical Competency

With the 11+ Kids programme interlinked throughout the McDonald's Junior Framework, players will develop fundamental physical competencies needed to participate in sport.

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## Four Corners Approach

All four corners (mental, social/emotional, technical/tactical, physical) are fundamental to their enjoyment, competency, and retention in the game long term.

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## Age-Appropriate Games

Small-sided games aid long-term development by providing more touches, shots, goals scored than larger formats of the game.

# Small-Sided Games

Junior Football is based around small-sided games. World-wide studies confirm that children get more enjoyment and learn more from playing in small-sided games with simplified rules.

With more involvement, players get to touch the ball more often and make more decisions with the ball never too far away.

The overall philosophy of Small-Sided Games focuses on enjoyment and freedom of expression with very little coach involvement, particularly in the crucial early stages.



# Team Formation Guidelines for Clubs



## McDonald's Mini Football (U9-U12)

### How teams are formed

To ensure players can play with their friends and that the focus for players is enjoyment and development over winning, the following guidelines should be followed:

- No selection of any junior teams from U6-U10
- No selection of a single 'top team' for U11-U12
- No trials are held in any junior age groups
- Below U12, this is not the right time for trials.
- Focus on developing a high-quality environment that facilitates motivation and enjoyment.
- Widen the snapshot and use trainings with larger groups to coach. Observe players where there is learning, training activities and mini-games involved.
- Playing with peers & social groups should be a strong consideration at these ages.
- Equal development opportunities and coaching should be provided to all players.
- One single 'top team' should never be selected at these ages.

### Understand the goals of the team formation process at these age groups

**Fun:** Is the environment fun for all?

**Retention:** Are the participants returning each season? We want to keep as many children in the sport as possible.

**Lifelong Engagement:** How will these processes aid the long-term retention of this athlete? Is the participant experience encouraging lifelong engagement in the sport?

**Equal Opportunity for Development:** Are all players receiving equal development opportunities?

**Challenge Point:** Are the participants getting an appropriate level of challenge in their environment?



# Balance is Better

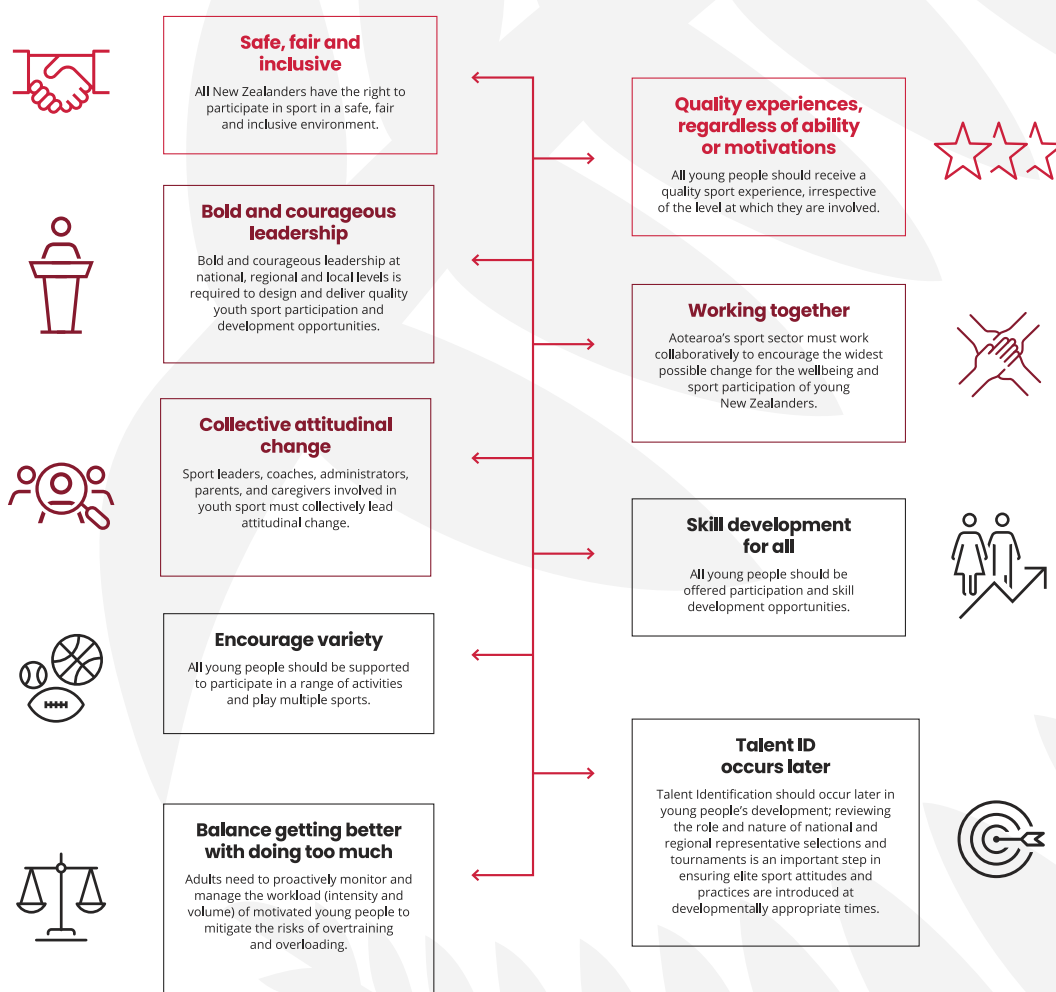
In 2019, five of the biggest sporting codes in New Zealand all agreed to commit to an evidence-based philosophy to support quality sport experiences for all young people, regardless of ability, needs and motivations. The philosophy behind Balance is Better was advocated in the award-winning New Zealand Football Whole of Football Plan in 2011.

The Balance is Better philosophy has been developed by Sport New Zealand to support the culture change needed to provide quality sport opportunities for tamariki. It's about young people staying involved in sport for life and realising their potential at the right time.

Balance is Better was developed along the principles of skill development for all, balancing getting better with not doing too much, and providing quality experiences regardless of ability or motivation.

This includes pushing back against early specialisation in one sport, an over-emphasis on winning at young ages and other factors that are proven to drive young people away from participating in sports as they get older. We are asking all our parents, whānau, coaches, managers and volunteers involved with football and futsal to remember that young people play sport to have fun, be challenged, develop and improve, be part of a team or group and enjoy time with friends.

## The principles of **BALANCE IS BETTER**





# Good Sports

Good Sports is a culture change initiative aiming to create positive sporting experience for children by educating and supporting the key adult influencers in youth sport.

Good Sports is a well-established and highly regarded initiative that is well aligned to Balance is Better. It recognises that supporting and educating adults is crucial to ensure Kiwi kids have the best chance of having positive sporting experiences and ultimately growing a lifelong love of sport.

Practitioners and research all find that many issues in the youth sport system stem from adult involvement. These issues can include poor side-line behaviour, overuse injury, burnout and disaffection with sport.

Good Sports focuses on raising adults' awareness about their behaviours and promoting a positive shift in that behaviour. New Zealand Football, and other regional federations are following Sport New Zealand's lead that Good Sports is our Parent Engagement tool as part of the overall Balance is Better philosophy.

## GOOD SPORTS SPINE

The Good Sports Spine is a tool to help parents, coaches, teachers and sport administrators understand how they impact children's sport experiences. The two different 'climates' should be seen as opposite ends of a continuum. To support children to have positive sporting experiences, adults should aim to always fall under the Climate of Development.



# Northern Region Football Staff Contacts

All clubs are members of the Northern Football Region. Each club will also have a relevant set of contacts for their members.

## Mike Corbett

Federation Competitions Manager

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## James Coleman

Northland Area Manager Team Lead

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Federation Development Manager

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# Gamedays for 4-8 year olds

Football at U8 and below is run in-house within clubs. Below are recommendations by the McDonald's NZ Junior Football Framework.

[VIEW McDONALD'S NZ JUNIOR FOOTBALL FRAMEWORK](#)

[DOWNLOAD c\[achmate™\]](#)

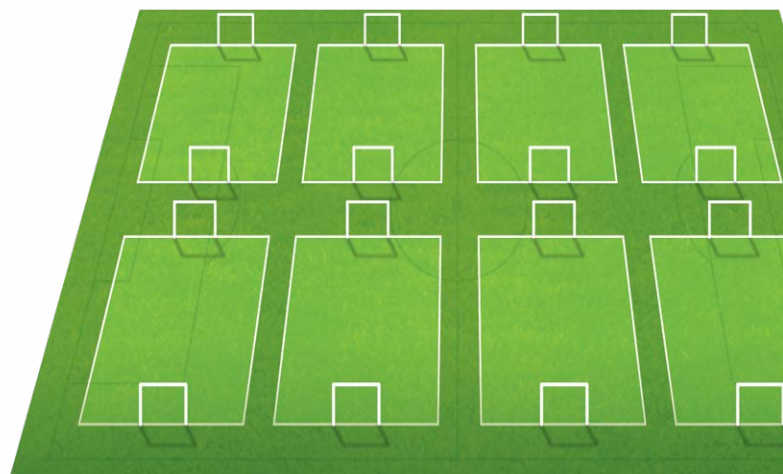
The playing formats for game day are based on world-best practice, the developmental needs of players and the reality of football in New Zealand. New Zealand Football suggest that fun activities are played before games to ensure maximum touches on the ball for all involved.



## McDonald's First Kicks (4-6 Years)

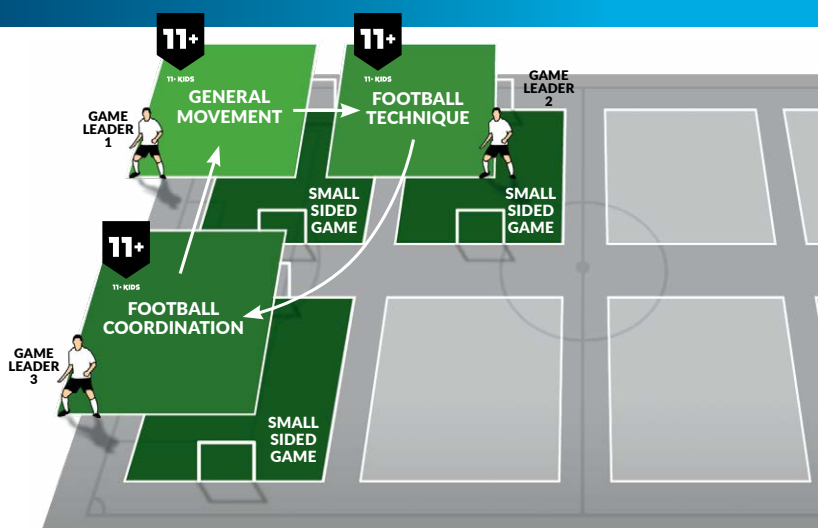
### FOOTBALL GAMEDAY SETUP

Format	<b>3v3 or 4v4 (without GK's)</b>
Minimum field size	<b>20 x 15m (3v3)</b>
Maximum field size	<b>30 x 20m (4v4)</b>
Minimum goal size	<b>1.5 x 0.90m</b>
Maximum goal size	<b>2 x 1m</b>
Ball Size	<b>3</b>
Contact time	<b>45-60 minutes</b>
Contact frequency	<b>2 x per week including Game day</b>
Max. Mini Pitches per field	<b>8</b>
No league, just play	



### FOOTBALL GAMEDAY OPTIMAL REQUIREMENTS

- Split players in to the relevant number of groups
- Allocate each group a mini playing area
- Rotate 3 x 8-10 minute station activities (11+ Kids, General Movement, Football Technique, Football Coordination)
- Followed by 3 x 10 minute Small Sided Games



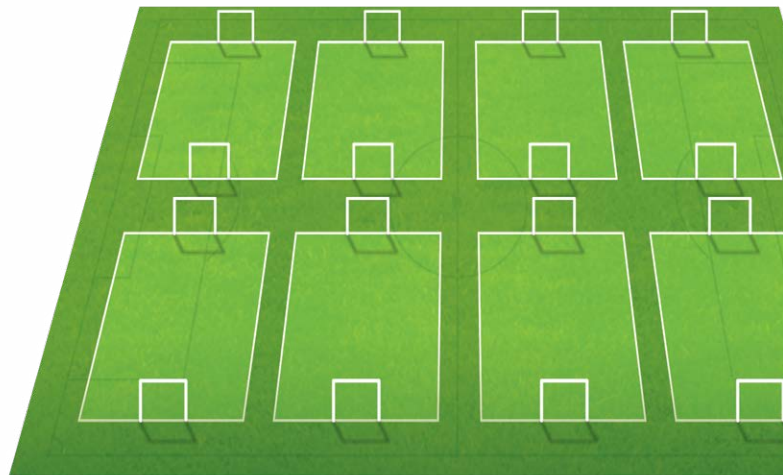
# Gamedays for 4-8 year olds



## McDonald's Fun Football (7-8 Years)

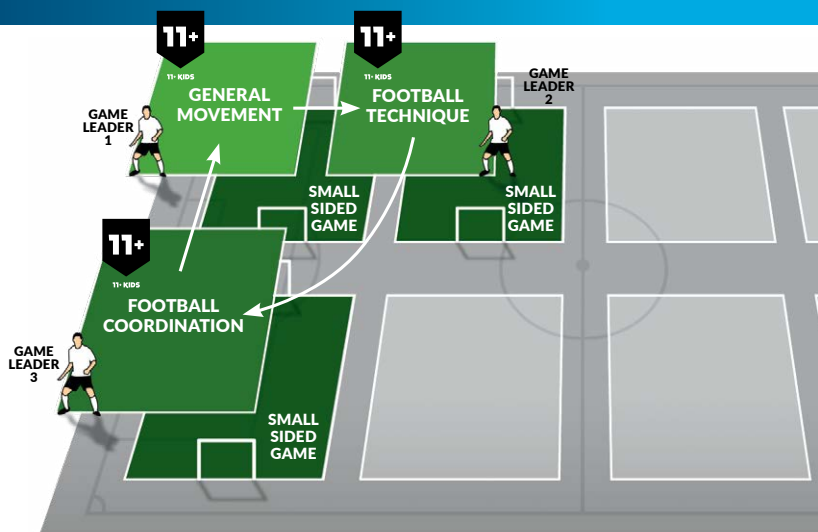
### FOOTBALL GAMEDAY SETUP

Format	4v4 or 5v5 (without GK's)
Minimum field size	30 x 20m
Maximum field size	40 x 30m
Minimum goal size	1.8 x 0.90m
Maximum goal size	2 x 1m
Ball Size	3
Contact time	60-75 minutes
Contact frequency	2 x per week including Game day
Max. Mini Pitches per field	8
No league, just play	



### FOOTBALL GAMEDAY OPTIMAL REQUIREMENTS

- Split players in to the relevant number of groups
- Allocate each group a mini playing area
- Rotate 3 x 8-10 minute station activities (11+ Kids, General Movement, Football Technique, Football Coordination)
- Followed by 4 x 10 minute Small Sided Games



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# Gamedays for 4-8 year olds

## General Rules & Setup

<b>Goal Keepers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No Goalkeepers (GK)</li></ul>
<b>Start and restart of play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Game starts with a kick forward to a teammate from the middle of the halfway line.</li><li>• Opposition must be 5m away from the ball at this time.</li><li>• To score a goal from kick-off it must touch someone else on the field before entering the goal.</li><li>• When a goal is scored, play is restarted at the halfway line by the team who conceded the goal.</li></ul>
<b>Ball crossing side-line (out of play)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kicked or dribbled back into play from behind the side-line.</li><li>• Defending team should be 5m away from the ball.</li><li>• In order to score a goal from kick-in or dribble-in, it must touch someone else on the field before entering the goal.</li></ul>
<b>Ball crossing goal-line (out of play)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A goal kick is awarded from anywhere along the goal line, regardless of who touched it last.</li><li>• No corner kicks. Players must retreat to their own half until the ball is kicked in to play.</li></ul>
<b>Scoring Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goal is scored when the whole ball crosses the line.</li><li>• Where cones/poles are used, the height of the goal should be of the tallest player.</li><li>• Goals can only be scored from the attacking half, as there are no goalkeepers.</li></ul>
<b>Offside</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No offside rule.</li></ul>
<b>Fouls &amp; Free Kicks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indirect free kick awarded if any deliberate handball or excessive physicality or other misconduct occurs.</li></ul>

## Considerations for the Game Leader

- Discourage players from constantly guarding the goal; promote maximum involvement.
- Most fouls/misconduct are not deliberate at this level. Give advantage to the attacking team; allowing the game to flow with minimal stoppage.
- Talk to players in the first instance; before opting to blow the whistle.
- No positions at this age; all players involved in all aspects of the game.
- Praise and encourage both teams in an enthusiastic and approachable manner.

# Gamedays for 9-12 year olds

Junior Football competitions from U9 to U12 are run by Northern Region Football.

[VIEW McDONALD'S NZ JUNIOR FOOTBALL FRAMEWORK](#)

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The playing formats for game day are based on world-best practice, the developmental needs of players and the reality of football in New Zealand. New Zealand Football suggest that fun activities are played before games to ensure maximum touches on the ball for all involved.



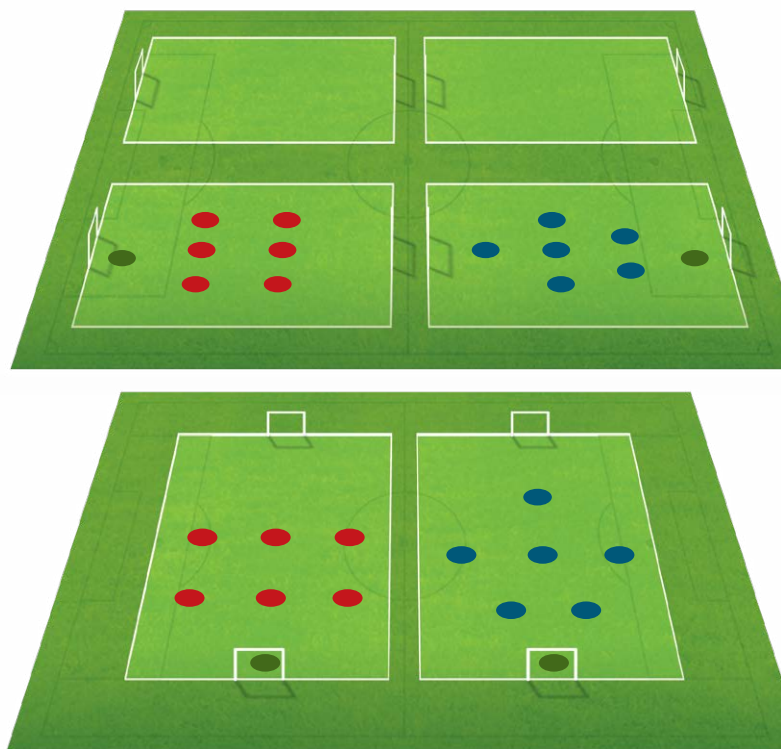
## McDonald's Mini Football (9-10 Years Old)

### GAMEDAY SETUP (9-10 YEARS)

Format	<b>7v7 (with GK's)</b>
Minimum field size	<b>45 x 30m</b>
Maximum field size	<b>55 x 35m</b>
Minimum goal size	<b>3.8 x 1.9m</b>
Maximum goal size	<b>4 x 2m</b>
Ball Size	<b>4</b>
Contact time	<b>75-90 minutes</b>
Contact frequency	<b>3 x per week including Game day</b>
Max. Mini Pitches per field	<b>4</b>
Formal Competition	<b>Home &amp; Away</b>

Football Coordination / Technique Warm-Up & 50 minute game

**U9/10 (7v7): 2x 25 minutes halves**



# Gamedays for 9-12 year olds



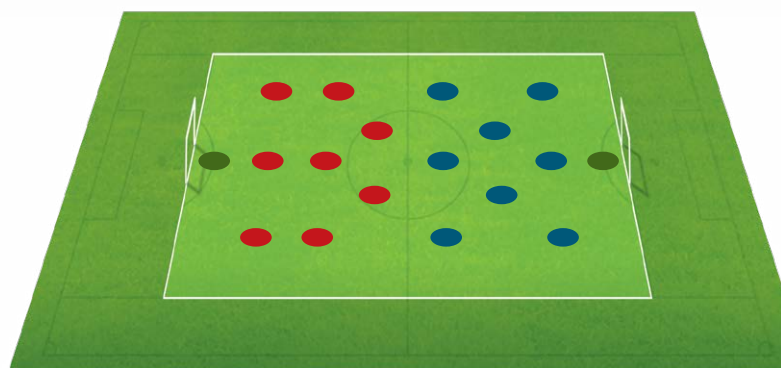
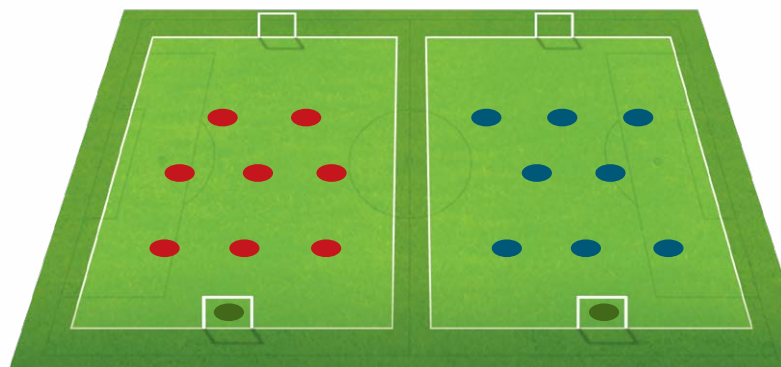
## McDonald's Mini Football (11-12 Years Old)

### GAMEDAY SETUP (11-12 YEARS)

Format	<b>9v9 (with GK's)</b>
Minimum field size	<b>60 x 45m</b>
Maximum field size	<b>70 x 50m</b>
Minimum goal size	<b>4 x 2m</b>
Maximum goal size	<b>5 x 2m</b>
Ball Size	<b>4</b>
Contact time	<b>90 minutes max.</b>
Contact frequency	<b>3 x per week including Game day</b>
Max. Mini Pitches per field	<b>2</b>
Formal Competition	<b>Home &amp; Away</b>

Football Coordination / Technique Warm-Up  
& 55 minute game

**U11/12 (9v9): 2x 27.5 minute halves**



# Gamedays for 9-12 year olds

## General Rules & Setup

### Goal Keepers

- Each team has a Goalkeeper (GK)
- To restart play after a save or gathering the ball with their hands, the ball must be thrown or rolled from the hands or played from the ground with their feet. The goalkeeper is not allowed to kick or drop kick the ball directly from their hands.
- When the GK has the ball in their hands or taking a goal kick: the opposition team must drop behind the retreating line until an attacking player has received the ball or the ball is played over the retreating line.

### Start and restart of play

- Game starts with a kick to a teammate from the middle of the halfway line.
- Opposition must be 5m away from the ball at this time.
- In order to score a goal from kick-off it must touch someone else on the field before entering the goal.
- When a goal is scored, play is restarted at the halfway line by the team who conceded the goal.

### Ball crossing side-line (out of play)

- Thrown in to play from behind the side-line.
- Player should face the field of play with both feet behind or on the side-line and should use both hands to deliver the ball from over their head.
- The thrower cannot touch the ball until it has touched another player.
- A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw in.

### Ball crossing goal-line (out of play)

- Corner kick awarded if last touched by defending team.
- A goal kick is awarded if last touched by attacking team.
- Defending players must drop back behind the retreating line when the GK has the ball.
- The opposition may advance over the retreating line once another player (other than the GK) has touched the ball; or the ball is advanced over the retreating line by the GK.

### Scoring Goals

- Goal is scored when the whole ball crosses the line.
- Where cones/poles are used, the height of the goal should be of the tallest player.

### Offside

- U9 & U10: Yes - Retreating Line.
- U11 & U12: Yes – Halfway.

### Fouls & Free Kicks

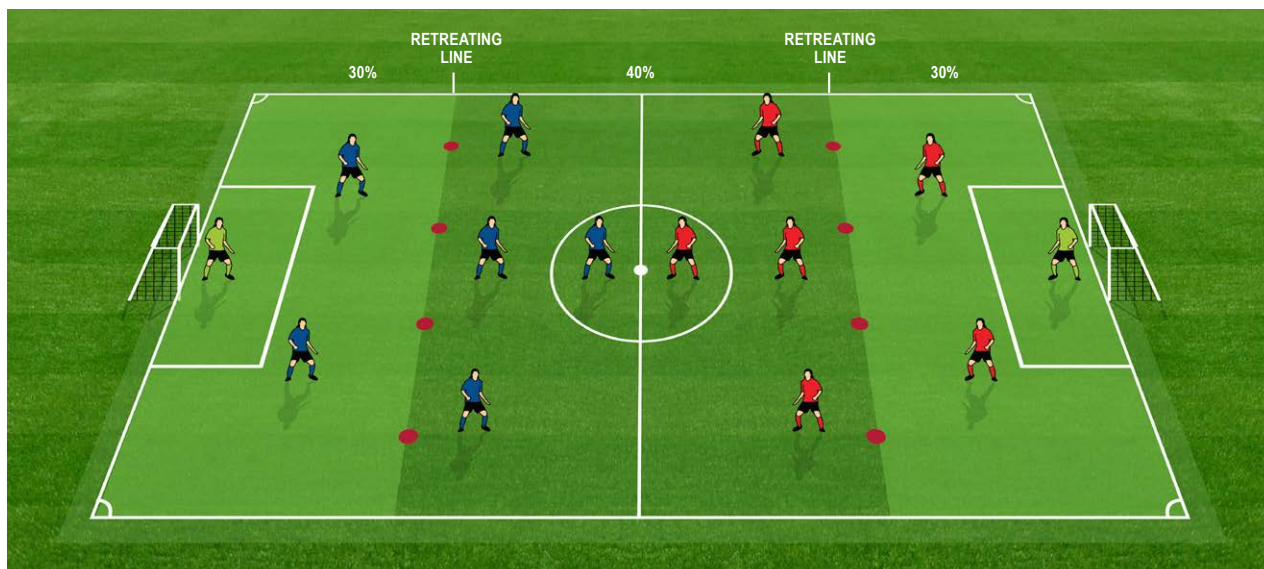
- Indirect free kick awarded if any deliberate handball or excessive physicality or other misconduct occurs.
- Deliberate handball or serious misconduct in the penalty area results in penalty kick 8m from goal, with GK in position.
- When any player is taking a Free Kick inside their retreating line: the opposition team must drop behind the retreating line until an attacking player has received the ball or the ball is played over the retreating line.



# The Retreating Line Rule



## McDonald's Mini Football (U9 & U10)



- Pitches are always marked with the Retreating Lines as 30%-40%-30% of all pitch sizes.
- This line can ideally be marked using spot markers across the pitch – but could be marked on the side-lines with high poles or high cones.
- In U9 & U10 7v7 formats, the Retreating Line is used for offside.
- The attacking player is **ONSIDE** when they are positioned before the defending teams retreating line, at the moment they are being passing the ball; even if they are beyond the last defenders at the moment the ball is passed to them from one of their teammates.



## McDonald's Mini Football (U11 & U12)

### The Offside Rule

- The attacking player is offside when, at the moment they are being passed the ball, they are positioned in the opponent's half and is the closer player to the opponent's goal line than the last defender.
- The attacking player is offside when considered to be 'in play' - either attempting to play the ball or interfering with the GK from an offside position.



## Gameday Challenge Point

Playing small-sided games at the appropriate challenge point is the ideal state

**What to do if the game becomes lopsided; and is no longer at the appropriate challenge point for both teams; here are some ideas:**

- Bring on an additional player (i.e., 8v7; 10v9).
- In-Game Player Challenge: Multiple passes (10 or more) before taking a shot on goal.
- Dominant team to remove a player.
- Swap players with the opposition if appropriate.

## Other Key Information

- U5-U8 football is administered in-house within clubs. Clubs will communicate relevant details for these programmes directly.
- Your age group is your age as of 31 December 2025.
  - Turning 11 in 2025 (11 years old on 31 December 2025) = U11 Football
- Referees at U9-U12 junior football are provided by teams.
- Substitutions are rolling/unlimited. Game time should be maximised for all players.
  - For U5-U8 ideally no subs on gamedays
  - For U9-U10 no more than 3 subs per team
  - For U11-U12 no more than 4 subs per team
- All draws (U9-U12) are published on the Northern Region Football website at [www.nrf.org.nz](http://www.nrf.org.nz)
- Kick-Off Times for U9-U12 are typically between 8.30am-12.00pm.
- Cancellations in the event of poor weather/ field conditions will be published on the NRF website or Facebook page on Friday nights and/ or Saturday mornings.
- We advise all teams to check the website for last minute fixture or ground changes before travelling to games.

## Code of Conduct

We aim to retain players, game leaders, referees, administrators year on year – it's about being able to participate in our sport to build lifelong engagement.

All adults involved in Junior Football should work collaboratively to ensure that everyone can enjoy football or futsal in a fair, safe and positive environment.

There is zero tolerance for any behaviour that takes away from a positive environment in junior football.

[VIEW NZF CODE OF CONDUCT](#)

[VIEW NZF SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN GUIDELINES 2023](#)

## Other Useful Resources

[VIEW NZF McDONALD'S JUNIOR FRAMEWORK](#)

[VIEW NZF JUNIOR TEAM FORMATION & GRADING](#)

[VIEW NZF WHOLE OF FOOTBALL PLAN](#)

[VIEW NZF STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2020-2026](#)



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**Football**

[WWW.NRF.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.NRF.ORG.NZ)