



GREAT GAME

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MEMO

To: AFL Cairns Senior Clubs

CC: AFL Cairns Staff

From: Brad Channon – Football Operations Manager - AFL Cairns

Date: Wednesday, 28th January 2026

Re: AFL Cairns Rule Changes 2026

2026 Rule Changes Confirmed

Laws of Australian Football rule adjustments:

The AFL has recently announced seven (7) rule changes for the 2026 season, as such AFL Cairns can confirm it will fully adopt those changes for all competitions under AFL Cairns and AFL Cairns Juniors management for season 2026, unless other wise communicated.

The changes are as follows (defined terms as per the *Laws of Australian Football*, *AFL Queensland Community Competition Rules and Procedures*, *AFL Cairns By-Laws* or *AFL Cairns Juniors By-Laws*):

- Remove the requirement for a Player to start in the Goal Square at each centre ball-up.
- For Senior Competitions only, introduce a Free Kick for the last disposal Out of Bounds in between the 50m arcs (for clarity, U13 and U15 Boys and Girls Competitions will remain as per s 17.4(m) of the AFL Queensland Community Competition Rules and Procedures, U17 Boys and Girls will remain as per AFL Cairns Juniors By-Laws 17.4 (m)).
- At all centre ball-ups, a competing Ruck cannot cross the Centre Circle line and engage with the opposition Ruck, prior to contesting the football.
- Around the ground, the Umpire may restart play without a nominated Ruck being present.
- A shrug in a tackle will be deemed a Prior Opportunity (i.e., as an attempt to evade or fend an opponent).
- A Player must stand if they are within the Protected Area (i.e., within five metres) when a Mark or Free Kick occurs.
- The interpretation of 'reasonable time' for a Player to bring the football back into play from a Behind being scored and the time allowed for a set Kick around the ground. Currently, 'reasonable time' for kick-ins is twelve (12) seconds, whereas around the ground is eight (8) seconds. Players will now be allowed eight (8) seconds in both instances.



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AFL Cairns and AFL Cairns Juniors are committed to continuing to work with AFL Cairns Umpire Manager, AFL Cairns Umpires Association and Umpires to ensure that they have the appropriate education on these changes to our competitions for season 2026 and beyond.

Minimum Age

AFL Cairns has also agreed to not increase the minimum age to 17 years of age to be eligible to play Senior Football (Men's and Women's) as per the 2026 National Community Football Policy Handbook. As such the minimum age to play Senior Football will remain at 15 as per AFL Cairns By-Laws 6.5. However, this will be reviewed in season 2026 to ensure that we are providing the appropriate opportunities and safety to all of our participants, ensuring that our players have the ability to play at the highest level, when they are developmentally ready. **All** underage participants still require parental consent, a further consent document will be given to clubs prior to the commencement of the season, and must be returned to AFL Cairns before the player is eligible to play Senior Football

Match Timing

Please see updated match timings as per AFL Cairns By-Laws 2026

COMPETITION	TIME OF QUARTERS	TIME OF BREAKS
Seniors	H&A: 20 mins + time on Finals: 20 mins + time on	6/20/6
Development	H&A: 20 mins, no time on Finals: 17 mins + time on	5/15/5
AFLCW	H&A: 17 mins, no time on Finals: 15 mins + time on	5/10/5
Div 3	H&A: 20 mins (halves), no time on Finals: 17 mins + time on	10 HT

Admission to Grounds

As per AFL Cairns By-Laws 2026, the following will be applied to matches in season 2026

Admission prices for all AFL Cairns venues in season 2026 are:

- (i) adults – six dollars (\$6)
- (ii) concession – free
- (iii) under 16 – free



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Cheers,

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