

AFLW Rules

There are AFLW specific rules listed below that differ from the AFL competition.

Duration of match and intervals between quarters

Increased quarter length to 17 minutes in total, broken down into 15 minutes with time on for goals or major injuries only, and the additional two minutes with time on for all match stoppages.

The length of the interval at quarter-time and three-quarter-time will be reduced from six minutes and 30 seconds to six minutes, and that the length of interval at half-time will be reduced from 16 minutes to 14 minutes.

Boundary throw-ins

Boundary umpires will move 10m into the playing surface when the ball goes out of bounds between the 50m arcs. Boundary throw ins within the 50m arcs will be completed from the boundary line.

The existing 'last touch out of bounds' rule will still apply between the 50m arcs.

Interchange cap and interchange boards

An interchange cap of 60 rotations per team per match will be introduced. Clubs will be permitted to use interchange boards to deliver messages relating to rotations and team tactics (as per the AFL competition).

Runners

There will be a cap on runners accessing the field of play. Runners can access the playing surface three times per quarter until the last three minutes of that quarter for a maximum of 90 seconds each time, as well as after a goal is scored.

AFLW-specific rules

Boundary throw-ins

Between the 50-metre arcs, boundary throw-ins happen 10m inside the boundary line, with the aim of landing approximately 25m into the field of play. Inside the forward and defensive 50-metre arcs, the boundary throw-ins happen from the boundary line.

Last disposal between the arcs

If the ball goes out of bounds between the forward and defensive 50m arcs as a result of a kick or handball, the opposing team will receive a free kick where the ball crossed the line. If it is not clear who touched the ball last, it is thrown in. This rule was introduced to reduce congestion and secondary stoppages.

Centre bounce 5-6-5

Just like the AFL has a 6-6-6 rule, there's a similar rule for AFLW which is the 5-6-5 rule, due to having only 16 players on the field. At centre bounces (or ball-ups), each team must have five forwards and five defenders inside their respective 50m arcs.

Three midfielders plus the ruck will be in the middle of the ground, with a winger somewhere on the long side of the centre square (technically a rectangle). A first infraction will result in a warning, but a second will be a free kick to the opposing side's ruck.

Rotation cap

For 2023 there will be a cap on the number of rotations clubs can use during a game of 60 rotations. This excludes rotations made due to injury assessment or blood rule, as well as any changes made at quarter-time, half-time or three-quarter-time.

On the clock

These games are short, sharp and action-packed. The length of an AFLW match has increased to 17 minutes per quarter, with time on called for all match stoppages during the last two minutes of each term. When you add in the breaks between every quarter, the whole match is done and dusted in two hours.

The team

Each team fields 16 a side, with the aim of improving the flow of the game and reducing congestion, with five players available on the bench (up from four in the AFL).

Team Runners

Each team Runner will be permitted to enter the field of play three times per quarter, as well as after any goals. They can be on the field for 90 seconds on their three trips but must be on their way off the ground after goals by the time play is ready to restart.

Interchange Boards

To assist with managing rotations and messages, clubs will be permitted to use interchange boards held up from their bench.

Ball size

It's a little difficult to tell from the stands, but at size four, the ball is a little smaller than the size five one used in the AFL competition. Analysis has shown the slightly smaller ball is easier for women to mark.

Bye bye, bounce

The traditional bounce has been "bounced" out, with the smaller ball meaning umpires throw up the ball in the centre and around the ground.

General football rules

Marks or free kicks in deep defensive 50

If a defender takes a mark, or gets a free kick, within nine metres of their own goal, then the player from the attacking team must stand the mark in line with the top of the goalsquare. This gives the defender a bit more room to run and create.

50m penalty

If paid a 50m penalty, the player with the ball can immediately advance the mark by

50m without waiting for the umpire, and restart play. The player on the mark cannot get in the way of the advancing player, or another 50m penalty will be paid.

Kicking for goal after the siren

If a player has taken a mark or been awarded a free kick just prior to the siren – whether it's the end of a quarter or the end of the game – they can now have a shot for goal using a checkside or snap kick. The player needs to ensure they end up in line with the player on the mark when they kick the ball, but can start on an angle.

Marking contest

The "hands in the back" rule interpretation changed in 2019, meaning a player can now hold their ground by placing their hands in the back of their opponent in a marking contest. However, they can't push their opponent in the back.

Ruck contests – prior opportunity

Another change in 2019. Rucks can now take possession when contesting a bounce, ball-up or boundary throw-in and will not be regarded as having had prior opportunity. The ruck for each team will continue to nominate to the field umpire, to assist in blocking frees and preventing a third player up.