Victorian Churches Football Association, Inc.

Junior Player Age Exemption Guidelines

Introduction

The VCFA utilise several criteria when assessing the suitability of junior age exemptions. The overarching principles being that the VCFA wants to encourage participation across the spectrum of age groups within the competition. The VCFA has a strategic focus on engagement, growth and support to ensure a solid foundation for the association's ongoing strength into the future.

The intention of providing any exemption is that it is considered beneficial to the development of the player, development of the club and most importantly, fair development of the competition.

The VCFA is under no obligation to grant any exemption and therefore the act of simply applying does not constitute automatic granting of an exemption.

Where clubs face situations that fall outside the exemption guidelines they are encouraged when appropriate to age a team up, rather than seek multiple exemptions to fit a team into a younger competition.

It is also important to note that while the VCFA will continue to always support club growth, that the responsibility to develop and expand a club's member base remains primarily with the club and exemptions should not substitute for activities that promote club growth.

Eligibility for Exemption Status

Clubs should consider the following Eligibility requirements prior to applying for an Exemption.

1) The maximum number of exemptions permitted for SSG (7 or 9 sided teams) is restricted to one (1).
2) The maximum number of exemptions permitted for 11 a side team is two (2).
3) Any player for whom the club seeks exemption must have less than two (2) years playing experience at any VCFA, FV or other association or equivalent level. Players outside of this criteria are ineligible for exemption.
4) No exemption applications will be accepted after 5pm AEST June 30 of the calendar year.

Club Evaluation Guidelines

Prior to completing this application, the club must assess the applicant based on the following guidelines.

1) The club believes the player will benefit from playing in a lower age group based on the skill level of the player.
2) The player will not pose a safety risk to other players in the lower age group based on relative size differences between the intended age group and the correct age group.
3) The team will not gain an unfair advantage because of this exemption.
4) The team in question has not exhausted the maximum number of exemptions permissible.

Should a club apply for an exemption that is clearly not aligned with the principles of the VCFA, in the spirit of granting exemption for the development of the league, or if the application is deemed misleading, deceptive or intended to deliberately secure an unfair advantage, the VCFA retains the right to rescind any granted exemption and act against the applicant club. Such action may also include the imposition of fines.

Application Process

Should the Eligibility and Evaluation Guidelines be met, an authorised club official can submit a completed exemption application form.

The exemption application form is provided by the VCFA on request.

1) The application form is completed and signed by both a member of the applying team (coach or team manager) and a member of the applicant club committee – preferably Club President.
2) The application is submitted to the VCFA General Manager for assessment with a response provided within seven (7) days of receipt of the application.
3) The VCFA Operations Team will use certain assessment criteria to evaluate the exemption.
4) It is in the clubs best interest to provide as much information as possible to support the application. While it is not required by the VCFA, supporting evidence to the application is encouraged.
5) During the assessment of the application, the player is ineligible to play as an exempt player.

VCFA Assessment Criteria

The VCFA will use several factors when considering approving an age exemption.

The criteria below are not exhaustive, but form a basis for assessing the application.

1) Player Skills Level: Level of player is significantly lower than current age group (i.e. the player is new to the game). Note that players with two or more years of playing experience are not eligible for exemption and must play in a suitable or older age group.
2) Physical Attributes: Consider the players overall size relative to the age group for which the exemption is sought. A player may not be granted an exemption irrespective of skill level where it is considered that it may pose a danger to other players in the age group.
3) Benefit to the Player: Does this benefit the player in terms of development, participation and other quality of life factors
4) Benefit to the Competition: Does the exemption benefit the age group or competition.
5) Professional Advice: Is the exemption recommended by a professional involved with the players welfare, including but not limited to medical practitioners, psychologist, coaches, ministers, pastors or chaplains.
6) Does the applicant club have a suitable team in an older age bracket to accommodate the player.
7) Is the exemption for the applicant to play in an age group two (2) or more years below the appropriate age group (age exemptions will generally be restricted to one year level below the appropriate age group only)
8) Any other criteria the VCFA deems appropriate to maintain the integrity of the competition.

VCFA Assessment Process

1) The VCFA General Manager will circulate the application as received from the club to the Operations Team for review.
2) The General Manager and two (2) Operations Team Members are required to approve the exemption for it to carry. The Operations Team is not required to form a meeting to discuss this approval. Acceptance or declinature can be made solely based on the application when considered against the outlined VCFA Assessment Criteria.
3) The Operations Team does reserve the right to request additional information from the club where questions are raised during the review process. These will be communicated to the applicant club by the General Manager within 7 days of receipt of the application.
4) In assessing the application, any Operations Team representative from the applicant club will abstain from the assessment and acceptance or declinature of the exemption application.
5) The decision will be communicated to the club by the General Manager within seven days of the initial application. During the assessment phase of the application process, the player is ineligible to play as an exempted player.

Exemption Application Outcome

The outcome of the application will be communicated to the club within seven (7) days of the initial application or within seven (7) days of receipt of additional information requested by the Operations Team.

1) Where the application is successful, the applicant will be notified, and the player deemed an exempted player. The player is eligible to play in the nominated team immediately, and will be identifiable as an exempted player in the Dribl system by the denotation of EX next to their name.
2) The VCFA reserves the right to withdraw an approved exemption at any time, where circumstances present that warrant such action.
3) Where the application is unsuccessful, the club will be notified and the grounds upon which the application was declined will be communicated to the club. The player is ineligible to play as an exempted player.

Appeal an Unsuccessful Application

The Club President may lodge an appeal to the VCFA General Manager within fourteen (14) days of the decision. The onus is on the applicant to provide additional information for consideration against the formal reason for declinature given by the VCFA General Manager.

Appeal Process

1) A VCFA panel consisting of three members, including at least one executive-level board member will be formed. Wherever possible, one of the panel members will be the junior match secretary.
2) The panel will review all documentation and associated information submitted in support of the application and the basis for the declinature issued by the General Manager.
3) The panel will respond to the appeal within fourteen (14) days of receipt.

4) The decision of the panel will be binding, thus exhausting the appeal process for that player exemption request.
5) The player is ineligible to play with exemption until the appeal is concluded.

Appeals Against Granted Exemptions

Where exemptions are granted the VCFA reserves the right to hear objections to the exemptions. These objections may be submitted by clubs or referees where the suitability of a player's age exemption is being questioned.

Appeal Process

1) A Club President or Referee can make a submission to the VCFA General Manager raising concerns around the suitability of a granted exemption.
2) This submission can only be based on the VCFA Assessment Criteria outlined and must provide clear evidence that the player and exemption contravene the intent of those criteria.
3) Where a submission is received from a Referee, match day examples would assist in qualifying how the exemption contravenes the intent of the assessment criteria.
4) The General Manager will inform the club subject to the appeal and the submitting club that the application has been received and will be reviewed.
5) During the appeal process the exempted player remains an exempted player and is eligible to play based on the approved exemption.
6) The VCFA Operations Team will respond to the request within fourteen (14) days.

Granted Exemptions Appeal Review Process

Initiation of Review

1) A review of a granted exemption can be initiated based on the submissions from clubs, referees or other relevant parties questioning the suitability of a players age exemption status.
2) However, applications will only be reviewed when submitted by
    a. a VCFA appointed referee or observer
    b. A Club President
3) Applications received in any other manner are deemed ineligible and are rejected.

Review Panel Formation

1) A review panel is established to review the application
2) The review panel must consist of a minimum of three (3) Operations Team members, including the VCFA General Manager or their appointed representative.
3) Members of the VCFA Board or the respective match secretary may be included at the request of the General Manager.
4) A quorum is established when at least three (3) representatives, including the VCFA General Manager (or their nominated representative) are present to review the exemption appeal.

5) No representative from either the appellant club, or the club for whom the exemption applies can sit on the review panel.

Review Process

1) The General Manager will inform the club that a quorum has been established and an intended date for the panel to meet and review the appeal.
2) All documentation and relevant information will be provided to the panel for review prior to the meeting.
3) Once the panel has met and reviewed the information provided, they must vote on whether to maintain or withdraw the exemption.
4) Each member of the panel has one (1) vote.
5) In the event of a tied vote, the VCFA General Manager holds the deciding vote to determine the outcome.
6) The panel may arrive at a decision where they have insufficient supporting information to decide an outcome. The VCFA Operations Team may, at its discretion, appoint a representative (s) to observe the player in question with the intent of receiving an independent report in support of making a final decision.
7) Where further information is required, the Operations Team are not required to inform the club. The intent here is an independent and clear evaluation of the appropriateness of the exemption and this process must be unencumbered.

Review Outcome

1) Once a decision has been reached, the VCFA General Manager will notify the clubs of the panel's decision.
2) If the exemption is withdrawn, the club has the right to appeal under the established appeals process.
3) If the decision of the Operations Team is that an exemption should remain in place, no further applications will be heard regarding the exemption status of this player from the appellant club.
4) However, the Operations Team reserves the right to review exemption status where it believes that the exemption goes against the spirit under which it was granted.

Appealing a Rescinded Exemption

The Club President may lodge an appeal to the VCFA General Manager within fourteen (14) days of the decision. The onus is on the applicant to provide additional information for consideration against the formal reason for declinature given by the VCFA General Manager.

Appeal Process

1) A VCFA panel consisting of three (3) members, including at least one executive-level board member will be formed. Wherever possible, one of the panel members will be the junior match secretary.
2) The panel will review all documentation and associated information submitted in support of the application and the basis for the declinature issued by the General Manager.
3) The panel will respond to the appeal within fourteen (14) days of receipt.

4) The decision of the panel will be binding, thus exhausting the appeal process for that player exemption request.