

1. The concepts and workload involved in starting a club. The emphasis will be on a gradual progression of club activities, the involvement of individuals in the running of a club, and the importance of establishing club structure to support future growth, while maintaining a realistic workload for those initially involved.

2. The physical requirements of starting a club. This section will cover everything from where to get equipment and information, making goal posts and scoreboards, to approaching local councils to attain playing space.

3. The organizational requirements of starting a club. This will discuss the transition from "a bunch of guys having a kick" to a true organization that has a sufficient critical mass that will continue growing without key individuals.

4. Fundraising. Some basic advice on approaching sponsors, membership dues, merchandise sales and making money to create a successful organization.

5. Quotes and tips from successful clubs. I will approach the pre-eminent clubs in the country and try to get them to divulge to us all the keys of their success.

Club Development.

So, you want to start a football club. You've seen the success so far of football in America and you want to bring it to your home town. There are many reasons for wanting to be a part of Australian Rules Football in the US, and an important part of developing a club is to work out what you are aiming to achieve with your club.

Some clubs have the sole interest of playing the game, others have a more social focus, with an interest in promoting Australia in the community, with football being a part of this.

Due to the wide variety of circumstances in which a football club may develop, my advice will focus on the first steps of getting a club started. I will draw heavily on my experiences with the Nashville Kangaroos, and the evolution of this organization.

STEP 1. I have an idea.

I was sitting in my office at work one day when the phone rang. "Hello, my name is Mike. I heard through a friend of mine that you were Australian. Do you want to go have a kick tomorrow?" That was the start of football in our town. The months that followed added several players, and regular training began.

At that time resource requirements were small. We had one ball (rugby unfortunately), five or six guys and a local park in which we competed for space with 2 junior soccer teams, a lacrosse tournament, 17 dogs, a tai chi class and (strangest of all) a group of medieval knights practicing their battle technique.

There were better facilities available, but we decided to stay with the crowd, because almost every time we were out, someone would come and ask us what we were doing. It was one of the most successful ways to get exposure, and new players. We still train and play at the same park, and now have the additional support of the park committee and Metro council.

One of the keys in the early stages of developing a club is regularity. Train at the same time and place each week. Ensure that your training remains fun and informative to new players who do not know the sport, as well as for more experienced players.

Constant communication with all players is also key, particularly in the early stages. It is very time consuming, calling 20 players every week, but as the team grows, allocating several people to help with calls is an easy way to distribute time consuming tasks.

The keys to the initial stages of club formation:

1. Consistency.

Lets assume that you are riotously enthusiastic about Aussie rules football. You know the game well, you were raised around it, or you've picked it up recently. Not all of your potential players will be in the same situation. It is important to realize that it will take a while to develop to the point that your potential players will attend football before something else that comes up. Most teams have experienced the trend that if they have 8-10 people at training each week, there will be a core of those who are always there, and a group who come periodically and then show up on match day.

The key to converting these people to fanatics is to ensure that training is on at the same time and place each week. Weekly social events such as watching taped games should also be at the same time and place, which also opens an opportunity for a relationship with the local watering hole.

2. Contact.

Regular contact with potential players to help them maintain enthusiasm is vital. This is mainly important for American players new to the sport, but we have found it relevant to Aussies as well. Phone trees are useful, so that several dedicated club members can share the load in calling newer players to remind them of up and coming events, and follow up on non-attendances.

3. Appeal.

The key to getting American players involved, keep it interesting. Mix things up to expose new players to a variety of game scenarios. Draw on the experience of all players who have been formally coached before for ideas, and seek feedback from all on what they enjoy.

STEP 2. We've had enough of training, when do we get to play?

One of the easiest ways to get started is to play in tournament format with other more established clubs around you. That way, your numbers can be supplemented by a stronger team nearby. USFooty 11's is another easy way to start with other regional clubs. If other teams are too far away, and you don't have the numbers to play a full game, 5 on 5 half court football with one set of goal posts is a decent way to give new players some greater exposure to match situations and rules. (As always, a competent umpire is a necessity. Max Whitman is a good contact through the USAFL to help with umpiring materials.)

STEP 3. Setting up an organizational structure.

The structure that you have in place really depends on the number of people that step up to the plate. The 3 main ones that you need to start with are-

- a.. President - main contact externally for the club.
- b.. Secretary - main contact internally for the club and deals with all the administration.
- c.. Treasurer - deals with the income and expenditure of the club and is responsible for setting up the bank accounts and writing cheques and making deposits.

As well as these positions, useful additions as you grow are:

- a.. Vice President
- b.. Webmaster
- c.. Coach

There are many ways to maintain the interest of people who are interested in having some organizational involvement who are unable to commit large amounts of time. The key to succeeding with this is to make sure these people maintain their focus on a specific area of operations. We have successfully used a committee structure where we have a football committee, which helps organize all issues related to playing. (i.e. training, match scheduling, promotions and sponsorship) The other component is the supporters/social committee which organizes all events. (i.e. pie nights, Australia day party, tennis tournament, match day events, merchandise etc.)

As your club continues to expand its activities, the addition of further specialized positions will help to spread out the workload. Some other suggestions are:

- a.. Director of Player Development - is responsible for handling all enquiries from new and prospective players
- b.. Director of Marketing and Communications – is responsible for merchandising, advertising, sponsorship, marketing and communications to the media
- c.. Director of Football Operations - is responsible for securing the ground for training and games, getting the ball, jumpers, goals and goal flags to the ground and getting players to assist in setting up the ground.

STEP 4. Fundraising.

The 2 easiest ways of getting money quick is to charge your players and supporters membership fees (around \$50 for players and \$25 for supporters seems to be the going rate), and selling merchandise. (including food and drink on game days, T-shirts and other club materials)

The important thing with membership is to make sure members perceive that there is value for money, and that there is a different price for non-members at all events.

A club newsletter is a good idea for promoting the club to members and non members alike, and gives your club the opportunity to offer something tangible to sponsors (advertising and promotion of upcoming events).

Sponsorship will always be an important financial part of your club as you become more developed. Make the most of all members of the club in finding contacts. (Almost everyone has an employer who may have money earmarked for community sponsorship) Australian style companies are also a good link, and don't forget that the USAFL has contacted many of these at a national level, so don't forget to seek help from us on individual sponsors.

Another important step is to get yourself a website and an email list server (try <http://www.onelist.com/> or <http://www.listbot.com/> - they're free). The website is a great way of attracting players and to distribute information. The same applies to the email list server. If you are using a newsletter as a mailout, you can post this on the web to keep it current. Don't forget to link it to the USAFL site, and send in all match results. (Contact Matt Muller to get your clubs address posted on the national website)

STEP 5. Hosting a game/tournament.

(Thanks to Paul Whiting at Boston for this and many other excerpts used in this document)

Building a Score-board

The basic scoreboard

- 1) buy 3ft by 7 ft plywood board
- 2) spray paint black
- 3) hammer in some nails for the numbers

The numbers

- 1) use 5" by 8" plywood boards
- 2) spray paint black
- 3) you will need the following:
 - a.. seven copies of Numbers 1,2 and 6
 - b.. five copies of all other numbers
 - c.. 6s can double as 9s

Labels

You can purchase individual letters from Hobby Stores or Home Depot for the "HOME" and "AWAY" labels.

Goal Posts

- 1) PVC tube in two different sizes. (To make the big posts BIGGER)
- 2) Bolts to join the posts. (Beware, some connectors are not strong enough)
- 3) Garden stakes. (The bigger the better, depending on whether you have soft soil)
- 4) Post driver. (Trust me, its worth the \$20)

Lines

You can get marking spray paint from most hardware stores. A long tape measure, string and a small garden stake will complete the job.

When you arrange your first game or demonstration, plan ahead to publicize it to fans, potential players, and the media. If you plan press releases for the media, keep them brief so they can just put what you say directly into the paper. 3-5 sentences is enough, as you can say away from it. Don't forget to try to provide as much service to the public as you can. If you can arrange to have rules available, team lists or a commentator, these are nice touches, and will help keep the fans coming back. Of course, selling things at the ground is a good fundraiser.

STEP 6. Club affiliation.

Everyone wants an identity, and it will help with your community relations as well. It is also an important step to provide you with an identity and uniforms. Please contact USAFL president, Rich Mann for prospective clubs. The USAFL wants to be involved in helping you contact clubs, as we have contacts in Australia who can help, and we want to avoid pestering the clubs.