



Hills Juniors

- DISPENSATION POLICY -

Background

The League requires clubs to register children in particular age-groups. In some cases, it may be appropriate for a child to regularly play outside his/her natural age group. This may be because of the child's physical size, ability, experience in comparison to his/her peers in a particular team, in recognition of a disability, or to balance team numbers.

Before a child plays outside his/her natural age group for any reason, it is mandatory that the player's home club complies with the requirements of this policy document.

Any game where a child plays out of his/her age-group without the authority of The League will be attract an automatic forfeit.

Any application to The League must be supported by the child's parent or guardian - under no circumstances will Dispensations be approved unless the parent or guardian, on behalf of the child, supports the request by signing the form.

Structure

Dispensation Requests will be considered by an Expert Panel (DEP) comprising three senior baseball people, appointed annually by The Executive and ratified by a vote of members prior to the start of each season. To decide applications, it will rely on:-

- an Assessment, mandatory for all applications,
- the paperwork provided by the applicant club, and
- guidelines published below.

Assessment will be carried out by an Assessor appointed by the DEP. There is no limit on the number of Assessors that can be appointed.

A Register will be created to record the circumstances of each Dispensation Request, including its outcome and any conditions imposed, which will over time form a series of precedents to guide future DEPs in their task.

Appeals against any decision of the DEP may be made to the next scheduled Meeting of The League, by either the applicant club: any other club with a Team in the affected conference: or any person who can provide evidence that the risk of injury to any person has been increased by a decision of the DEP. Any such appeal, once heard and resolved by a Meeting of The League, is final.

Policy

Dispensations are available in four types. The procedures involved with each are:

Pre-Season Dispensations

A club seeking dispensation for a player for the entire season must complete a Dispensation Request on the appropriate form (available from the website) and

submit it to the Competition Secretary no later than 5pm on the second-last Friday of August each year.

The player involved must be seen by an Assessor either in training, at a game, or at an Assessment Session. An Assessment Session will be held at a time & place of The League's choosing, during the second-last and last weekends of August each year.

The Assessor will provide The League's DEP with a report on the player. The DEP in turn will decide whether to approve the Dispensation or not, and advise the applicant club of its decision prior to September 1st each year.

In-Season Dispensations

Should a club seeking a Dispensation fail to provide a Dispensation Request as required above, then that club is entitled to submit such Dispensation Request to the Competition Secretary at any time before the commencement of Round 16.

However, the DEP is not required to reconvene after August, and will do so only if the {volunteer} members choose to do so. Furthermore, Assessors are also volunteers, and it is possible that a player who is the subject of an In-Season Dispensation may not be seen by an Assessor in a timeframe that suits the applicant {if at all}.

An In-Season Dispensation cannot be approved without the endorsement of the DEP, nor without the player being Assessed. Therefore, clubs should be aware that an In-Season Dispensation might either be delayed, or indeed might fail completely, by reason of lack of these required approvals.

Provisional Dispensations

In cases where a club has identified the potential for a player to substitute in a couple of games outside his/her natural age-cohort, that club is encouraged to submit a Dispensation Request promptly.

Doing so, including subjecting the player to formal Assessment before the season starts, guarantees that the player will be available as a substitute [if approved] when and if circumstances dictate, without the need for further paperwork.

Interim Dispensations

Should a Team find itself short of players for a particular game, there is one final avenue available. A club may contact the Competition Secretary {or, if unavailable, any member of The League's Executive Committee} any time up to the start of a game, to seek Interim Dispensation for a player to play as a substitute in that game. If granted, such Interim Dispensation is valid only for that single game.¹

Importantly, the grant of an Interim Dispensation remains subject to formal Assessment and ratification by the DEP in due course. If that becomes impossible for logistical reasons: or the unavailability of an Assessor: or the lack of a meeting of the DEP: then no further approval for future games in respect of that player is available.

¹ In the case of multiple games being played over one week, the Exec member involved may, at his/her discretion, grant Dispensation for multiple games during that week.

Guidelines for DEP Approval

The requirement to go through this process is mainly a duty-of-care issue. Therefore, the only absolute criterion is that the DEP is satisfied that neither the player or anyone else is put at additional risk by playing out of his/her age-group.

Beyond that, here are some guidelines...

- For a child to play “up”, s/he ought to be of a physical size comparable to at least some others in the older age-group, and have skills appropriate to the older age-group. This will usually mean they are of Hills or NSW representative standard in their own age-group, or close to it.
- Applications for 1st year children to play “up” are unlikely to be granted.
- Applications for Div 1 players to sub in an older Div 3 conference will likely fail.
- Applications for 2nd year players to play “down” are unlikely to be granted.
- Players who are granted a Dispensation will generally not be allowed to pitch or catch, unless the diamond size in their requested conference is the same as the one in their natural age-group.
- In the past, some players under Dispensation have been restricted to playing only in the outfield, if it is considered that they would have a significant impact playing the infield.
- Medical evidence, if appropriate, may be submitted to support any Dispensation Application.
- In the past, the League has tried to discourage the use of Dispensations to balance team numbers. This year, we have abandoned that concept, as it is quite clear that some clubs need to do exactly that to stay viable..

Guidelines for Assessment

The Assessor must have seen the player first-hand, either at a training session, a formal assessment session, or in a game situation. S/he should consider the request in respect of each player in the context of:-

- (a) Whether the player would be at greater risk of physical injury if the Dispensation was granted than they would be by staying in their natural age-cohort,
- (b) Whether any other players would be at greater risk of physical injury if the Dispensation was granted than they would be if the player stayed in their natural age-cohort,
- (c) Whether, in the view of the Assessor, the Dispensation *if granted* would adversely affect the integrity of any of The League’s conferences.
- (d) There is no special allowance for a player being female.

Assessment is not required for the grant of an Interim Dispensation by a member of the League’s Executive, but it will be required for the League to ratify such Interim Dispensations retrospectively.

Guidelines for applicant clubs

- 1) Note that a Dispensation is not required to play as a sub in a higher grade in the child's natural age group. However, it is required to play in a different team in the same grade:- this is the only time where an Assessment is not required.
- 2) If seeking Dispensation for a younger player to play up an age group (in any circumstances), then first consider whether your club has a lower-grade team in that older age group. The League would expect subs to first come from lower grades rather than from a younger age-group. We understand that sometimes lower-grade players are scared of playing in a higher grade, even as subs, but that doesn't mean they should be ignored in favour of a good younger player. At least ask your lower-grade teams first, or you risk complaints from families.
- 3) If you're trying to balance team numbers with a Dispensation, then be honest and say so. This criterion, unlike prior years, is now an acceptable reason to apply for a Dispensation.
- 4) If you're trying to balance team numbers, then provide a valid reason why you've chosen this particular player as the one to move up or down, as opposed to any of the others in the team. For example, if you want him/her to move up an age group, then reasons like "*s/he is the oldest player in the younger age-group*" or perhaps "*nobody else in this team wants to move up*" are perfectly acceptable. A reason such as "*this is the best player in the younger age-group and therefore will contribute the most to the older one*" is not, in isolation, acceptable.
- 5) Provide a phone contact number where requested on the form. The DEP will be considering many Dispensation Requests at one meeting, probably at night, and may require clarification of information on the form. If they can't get in contact with somebody, they're likely to deny or defer the application.
- 6) Please take this statement seriously:- ***Incomplete paperwork will instantly render the application invalid.*** The DEP will not approve Dispensation Requests "*subject to Assessment*", or "*subject to the parents' signature*", or indeed "*subject to anything at all*". They're entitled to have all the facts available to them when doing their work. We cannot expect them to follow up flawed applications:- they are being asked to donate their time and expertise to make decisions. We can't ask them to become clerks or auditors.
- 7) Don't underestimate the difference between a Pre-Season and In-Season application. By lodging an application in accordance with the protocol for Pre-Season Dispensations, you are guaranteed an answer. If you leave it until September or later, there is a very real chance that the application won't be dealt with in time to suit your team or the player. It may not be heard by the DEP at all:- your Executive has no intention of trying to compel or coerce the DEP to meet just to deal with one or two Dispensation Requests from clubs who ought to have applied earlier.
- 8) In that same vein, if you see any possibility that you might need Provisional Dispensations, then apply for them early. That will guarantee that you have subs available for four games in the older age-group, instead of the single game available under the Interim Dispensation protocol. An obvious alert for this situation is a club with only nine players in an age-group, and no lower-grade team in that cohort. It's a virtual certainty that at some stage during the season, such a team will need subs and the only place they'll find them is in a younger cohort.