



Football Roster Formation Guidelines

Overview

If it can be said that there is a single governing principle for the formation of Apex Sports Authority Pop Warner Football teams it is this: **play together/stay together**. This means that the default team assignment is to remain closely affiliated with a group of players over the course of several seasons. While there have been pleasantly surprising blips, our own history and the examples provided by the traditionally competitive programs within CFF have shown that a familiar veteran team has the best chance for on-field success.

That is not to say that the Pop Warner Football & Cheerleading program administered by the Apex Sports Authority is a win-at-all-costs experience; far from it. We recognize that that the Pop Warner Football experience spans many levels. Our goals are twofold:

1. To establish an environment where boys and girls can learn and enjoy the game of football.
2. To field teams which strive to be competitive at the appropriate levels within the ranks of CFF.

The degrees to which each of these goals is emphasized will vary depending on the level of play.

Players at the Instructional Levels - Flag, Tiny Mite and Mitey Mite - are here to learn. These are 5-9 year old children who are discovering football and seeking to have a good time with friends and family. If they win a few games, that is terrific. When they lose a few games, they'll have a chance to learn some valuable life lessons. Along the way,

they'll play and learn and make friends and hopefully, when the time comes, decide to play football with ASA again.

Players at the Competitive Levels -Jr. Pee Wee, Pee Wee, Jr., Midget and beyond - while hopefully still learning and enjoying, have the added challenge of actually competing. There are trophies to be won and banners to be raised at the local, regional and national levels of competition. These players and their opponents have typically – though not always – been around the game for a few years. Under the **play together/stay together** foundation, they've gotten to know themselves and their teammates and are working to apply all that they've learned about football to winning some games.

Football is the ultimate team sport so the manner in which teams are constructed and taught is significant and should be understood by all.

What follows is a level-by-level breakdown of the Apex Sports Authority guidelines for roster formation. Please keep in mind that these are guidelines not rules and that they are dynamic and being refined as time passes.

Flag (ages 5-7, no weight restrictions):

ASA strongly suggests that all its 5 year old participants get their first taste of football at the flag level. This is done to present some of the basics of football (stance and start, positions, plays, rules, expectations) without the complications of heavy equipment and full contact. Certainly 6-7 year olds who are new to football or have some issues with the weight requirements of the tackle levels or who just want to try flag football are welcome to participate as well.

Rosters are capped at 12 players per team.

Tiny Mite (ages 5-7, 35-75lbs)

At this level the goal is to introduce full-contact football, make it fun, teach a little something and have the player return. Scores are not kept during the games to highlight the instructional emphasis.

Using the **play together/stay together** guideline, players returning from a given team the previous year are treated as a unit. Beyond that considerations are geared toward trying to make the experience as positive as possible by addressing parental/player requests. See the Common Requests section near the end for examples of typical, acceptable requests. These (example requests) and others are welcome.

From amongst the pool of “free agent” newcomers, players will likely be assigned to a team that practices in relative geographic proximity to their house or perhaps on a team with schoolmates. The goal is to make it all comfortable and convenient.

Mitey Mite (ages 7-9, 45-90lbs)

Mitey Mite football is still considered instructional football. Scores are kept during the game but overall standings are not. Some of the rules are toned down to emphasize that it is still instructional (i.e. no blitzing, no rushing kicks).

At this age there are still a lot of newcomers to football but the players are generally a little bigger, a little faster and they’ve made a little bit more of a commitment to football. This is, first and foremost, represented in the extra day (3) per week of practice.

As always, we will work on the **play together/stay together** paradigm but here we add an additional consideration so that we may facilitate a smooth transition to the competitive levels. On the whole, we look at Mitey Mite football as a 2 year commitment. Players rising from Tiny Mite will be grouped together with the intent that they stay together at this level of competition for 2 years and then collectively move on.

Thus we create a pipeline of players who can learn from/about each other over a period of years.

Newcomers still are encouraged to present their requests for placement but we will be up front about our long-term vision for this level of play.

It is not cast in stone but, by and large, we will try to manage this so that experienced, familiar groups are moving up to the competitive levels together.

Jr. Pee Wee (ages 8-10, 60-105lbs, age 11, 60-85lbs)

This is the great transitional level. There are three groups of players to consider:

1. Here we first introduce the concept of older/lighter. Note the parenthetical age/weight breakdown. Jr. Pee Wee is for 8-10 year olds but 11 year olds can play here if they are light enough. Some of the smaller Jr. Pee Wee players from a given year may opt to remain at this level for a 2nd, 3rd (or even 4th) year if their weight allows.
2. A handful of newcomers to football show up at the Jr. Pee Wee level.
3. With the pipeline and the **play together/stay together** mantra, there should be the majority of a team - or teams - rising from the Mitey Mite ranks.

Pee Wee (ages 9-11, 75-120lbs, age 12, 75-100lbs)

Here the “hardcore” competition begins. A single team rises from the combined ranks of Jr. Pee Wee and joins with newcomers to the program to field what we hope is a competitive squad.

Jr. Midget (ages 10-12, 85-135lbs, age 13, 85-115lbs)

This is typically the end of the line before players move on to Middle School. Theoretically the core of the Mitey Mite team that first took the field four years prior has risen together and is now a committed, cohesive, competitive unit.

Midget (ages 11-14, 105-160lbs, age 15, 105-140lbs)

Prior to 2009, Apex Sports Authority never fielded a Midget team. This 8-10th grade pool of talent would be foregoing participation in Middle School or High School junior varsity football. Standard roster guidelines apply.

Additional Teams

As the organization grows there will come a need to add an additional team at this level or that level based on demand. While doing this we would like to maintain the pipeline and the **play together/stay together** ideas.

The commissioner’s office will designate a cutoff date between early registration and late registration. Returning players registering during the early period who have specific requests will be given a priority. The remaining registrants (newcomers and returnees

who register late) will still be allowed to state preferences but they will receive a lesser priority. See section entitled “Funneling” for

This will be the basis for establishing initial team rosters. Once x number of teams are full (full is defined as 15 players for Flag, 22 for Tiny Mite and 27 at every other level) at a given level, a waiting list will be formed. Should the waiting list reach 18, the commissioner’s office will assess the continued interest of those players and attempt to assemble a coaching staff. 18 interested players and a coaching staff will be the criteria for forming a new team.

Once the waiting list has been exhausted some roster analysis will occur. It is conceivable that some players/families from the established team(s) may be approached about accepting voluntary reassignment to the new team in an attempt to even up the numbers. Once rosters have been disseminated to coaches, no player will be forced to change teams through action initiated by the commissioner’s office.

This is an unrefined process. Unforeseen circumstances may arise. In all cases the commissioner’s office reserves the option of making adjustments in the best interest of a positive experience for all.

Funneling

In the scenario where parts of three Mitey Mite teams are moving up to a projected two Jr. Pee Wee teams or two Jr. Pee Wee teams are moving up to a projected single Pee Wee team, first come/first served will take on additional weight. In the extreme case, it becomes hard to justify putting a newcomer who registers on “opening day” (i.e. clearly wants to play) on a waiting list while waiting for a returning player to decide a month and a half later.

Over time this consideration may manifest itself in the form of the commissioner’s office designating different returning player cutoff dates for different levels of play.

Insufficient Registration

If there are not sufficient registrants to build a team at a given level, two courses of action will be followed:

1. Players from other levels will be provided an opportunity to move up or down depending on their own age/weight and roster availability at other levels. In this way, a Pee Wee waiting list might help to fortify a Jr. Midget team. Mitey Mites would not be asked to move up as their Instructional play should be maximized.
2. Assistance will be provided to redirect players to a program that can support them. Prior to 2009 this was done at the Flag and Midget levels whenever enrollment numbers were low and generally meant moving those players to the Cary Pop Warner program.

This can be done with waiting list participants as well but the time frames might not work out as well because other programs will fill up as time passes.

Roster Limits Explained

The number 27 was chosen to define a full roster for most levels of play because it provides for enough players to accomplish intra-squad scrimmages during practice with a bit of a buffer for illnesses, injuries and other assorted absences. Having more players inevitably leaves the coaching staff scrambling to accomplish minimum play requirements for 7-10 players at the end of each 3rd quarter.

The number 22 was chosen for the Tiny Mite level because, technically, that is the maximum roster size for a Tiny Mite team. In 2007 and 2008 CFF participated in a pilot program that expanded the size to 28 but there is no guarantee that this pilot program will persist. ASA finds a minimum play requirement of 15 plays per player and a continuously running clock to be incompatible with so large a roster.

The number 12 was chosen after consultation with our veteran Flag level coaches. Flag teams field 8 players and use a running clock for 2 shorter halves of football. Having much more than 12 players makes it impossible to get the kids meaningful playing time.

The number 18 was chosen as the point at which to establish a new team because, in the end, the objective is to get as many of these kids as possible on the field playing football. 18 will provide just the tiniest buffer over the Pop Warner minimum roster size (16).

Circumventing the Cap

There are some circumstances where can find itself with a roster size over the prescribed cap:

1. As the season approaches, the head coach(es) of existing team(s) may be asked if they are able to accommodate additions to their roster from the waiting list above the 27 player cutoff. This is at the discretion of the head coach and his staff.
2. We have a coach's kid(s) play with the coach rule. If, for some reason, one of the 8 roster coaches comes on board after a team has hit the cap, that coach's child is still added to the team.
3. Players who have registered at a different level of competition but been unable to meet the weight or skill requirements can be moved up or down outside of the cap limits. See the "Making Weight" section for important details.

It is recognized that items 2 and 3 above present some opportunity for unscrupulous manipulation of the roster cap. Each instance will be monitored and, the merits of allowing these items will be reviewed as the process evolves.

Common Requests

Siblings: If the ages and weights work out, then siblings who so desire will be on the same team. With practices 2-3 nights per week and games all across central North Carolina the logistics of attending two sets of practices and games get to be a challenge for parents. This may have some carryover to parents wishing to have kids in different age groups practicing at the same field.

BFF: Players generally become players because they have friends who are players and want to play with them. This may also enable carpooling among parents.

IMBY (In My BackYard): Parents residing in the Walden Creek neighborhood aren't often very eager to practice at Middle Creek, for example. At the Instructional Levels, this is given weight automatically. However, as practice field resources become further limited, this consideration will be deemphasized. There is increasingly less flexibility to provide options.

Recruitment: Coaches are a wonderful resource for bringing players into the program. Most do so with the idea of building their own team which leads to requests along the lines of "We'd like to play with Coach So-and-so." This is all well and good but coaches should make parents aware during the process that once their own roster is full, new recruits will go into the general pool. The player would have the option to go on a waiting list for that particular team. It may become a question of playing versus waiting with some risk.

Coach's kids: Official coaches get to coach their kids if they so desire...period. The organization as a whole will do its best to educate coaches, to avoid the implementation or perception of "daddy-ball" (nepotism) and to see that official coaches actually contribute to the coaching process. With that said, volunteering to coach is a tremendous commitment of time and energy and is often a parent-child bonding experience. We do not have such a pool of candidates that we can afford to run anyone off with a restriction in this area.

Bear in mind that all of these requests are welcome. Contrary requests are also welcome. All requests will be heard but there is no commitment that all requests will be honored.

Making Weight

There are always players who sign up for a given level and, even after a few weeks of conditioning practices, are unable to meet the weight requirements. Depending on their age, some of these players have the option to move up to the next level of competition. For example, an 8 year old Mitey Mite who can't make the 90lb weight limit has the option to play at the Jr. Pee Wee level (105lb. weight limit). Players who find themselves in this circumstance – having signed up early enough to be on a team, and having practiced as much as their peers – will have a spot on the higher level roster unless that

roster has reached the Pop Warner maximum. There is no penalty for trying to meet the ASA recommendation of playing at the lowest level possible and then being unable to do so. However, the commissioner's office will review these cases to prevent abuse of this loophole as a means of working around the roster size limits.

Coaching

Coaching Pop Warner Football is a year-to-year, two-way commitment. That means that no coach may assume s/he will be returning as a coach and no organization may appoint "tenured" coaches. These are Pop Warner rules.

That said, ASA recognizes that familiarity with a coaching staff is every bit as important as familiarity with a set of players. There will be a complete annual evaluation of coaching applicants. Should significant pieces of a particular staff return, every effort will be made to have the players-coaches relationship continue. A majority of the time this will be reinforced by specific parental request.

Nomads

"**Play together/stay together**" as a core philosophy is fine however it is not all-encompassing. There is certain dynamism from year to year that needs to be handled. There will be groups of younger or smaller players who remain at a given level while their former teammates and coaches move on. There will be groups of older or larger players who move up while their teammates and coaches stay down. A coaching staff may evaporate entirely for whatever reason. A new head coach may combine pieces of previous staffs and introduce an entirely new philosophy or playbook. This happens in spite of our efforts to create a pipeline and it is unavoidable. These are generally small clusters, numbering less than a dozen, a number below the size of a strong core group. These players are "**nomads**".

One of the biggest benefits of play together/stay together is familiarity, a player being just that little bit ahead of the learning curve because some of the same ideas were presented last year. This benefit is almost entirely muted for these players.

Once a group has separated from the pipeline, it is very unlikely that all would reconnect with the same group. The goal then is to reset these individual players' team associations in such a way as would enable them to establish the desired continuity with a different group.

Closing

Again be mindful that **play together/stay together** is a guideline, not a rule. Requests from parents and players and coaches are welcome and encouraged. However, such

things as continuity, chronology and relative roster sizes will be considered at the same time, thus all requests may not be met. Continuity refers to the composition of the coaching staff. A wholesale or large scale makeover, especially at the competitive levels, may have an impact on the team's makeup. This can be due to prior relationships, coaching philosophy, etc. Chronology refers to time of registration; a player making a particular request early in the process has a better chance of having it met than one who registers right up against the registration deadline. The relative roster size consideration is in place for the circumstance where team #1 at a given level has 27 players and team #2 at a given level has 19 players. Newcomers can certainly request to play with team #1 but may find themselves on team #2 just to ensure its ability to field a team.

Changes

- 02/19/08 – Removed 2 references that implied coaching staff were expected to remain together across seasons.
- 02/19/08 – Redefined a “full” team at Flag and Tiny Mite levels as 22 players per Pop Warner definition for Tiny Mite. Added an explanation for this.
- 03/12/08 – Redefined a “full” Flag roster as 15 per notes from last coaches meeting.
- 04/14/08 – Removed specific references to specific teams so as to not risk “dating” the document.
- 04/29/08 – Cleaned up some repeated phrases.
- 04/29/08 – Added the “Making Weight” section.
- 04/29/08 – Moved some roster details into and added text to the “Circumventing the Cap” section.
- 09/25/08 – Emboldened all references to “play together/stay together”.
- 09/25/08 – Removed any text that insinuated Apex would never field a Midget level team
- 09/25/08 – Removed text about only supporting a single Flag level team
- 09/25/08 – Redefined Tiny Mite as the level where we introduce “full-contact” football.
- 09/25/08 – Removed discussion of coaching staffs in Jr. Pee Wee section.
- 09/25/08 – Added the Midget section.
- 09/25/08 – Added Roster Limits Explained section.
- 09/25/08 – Deemphasized the IMBY practice location request.
- 09/25/08 – Added Coaching section
- 01/27/09 – Correcting grammar.
- 01/27/09 – Amended the Midget section to reflect expected participation in 2009.
- 01/27/09 – Added “Insufficient Registration” section.
- 01/27/09 – Added “Nomads” section.
- 02/20/09 – Added the “continuity” clause to the “Closing” section.
- 02/20/09 – Added the “Funneling” section to clarify some first come/first served considerations.
- 04/16/09 – Changed the recommended Flag roster limit from 15 to 12 following a conversation with Todd Hille.
- 04/16/09 – Added a “Flag” paragraph to the “Roster Limits Explained” section.
- 04/16/09 – Added some additional alternatives to the “Insufficient Registration” section indicating that if there is, for example, a full Pee Wee level and a sparse Jr. Midget level, later Pee Wee registrants may be asked to consider a move up.