

## BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

The Eastern Region Junior Soccer Association (ERJSA) is an independent sports association that has evolved from school-based clubs and competitions. ERJSA is a volunteer run organising body that typically arranges a 14-round participation-based winter soccer season with the support of its member clubs for children aged 4 to 12.

To register, players must register with our clubs directly. Any child from any locality can play for one of our clubs if space is available. Most clubs in our competition are independently run incorporated bodies that maintain close ties to one or more schools in their geographic location, all of which are currently located on the eastern shore in Hobart, Tasmania.

By application, ERJSA also remains open to new clubs or schools that wish to join our competition. ERJSA runs regular committee meetings each year and requires clubs to send a representative to participate in the conversation and decision-making process.

We have observed that most sporting bodies mostly only cater for the top percentages of children with programs that are aimed at being the best that can be. Our focus is instead to create a social environment open to children of all abilities. Time has shown us that the most common obstacles for children wanting to play team sports include overly competitive environments, too much pressure being placed on volunteers, mismatched expectations, and children who are just a little more switched on for their age, or are simply fast, create inequitable situations that lead to reduced participation and increased disharmony around grounds.

We adopt the approach that even on game day, we are all learning and must work together. Many of our clubs are not able to train during the week and in many cases the children (and sometimes coaches) are still learning the rules on game day.

Therefore our philosophy is not to train the best of the best, but to adapt the national rules to allow for ongoing learning. In doing so we aim to create an environment where players, game leaders, coaches, managers, and spectators all feel safe, have an enjoyable time, and do not take it too seriously, all while attempting to manage the games and leagues for some healthy competition.

The small changes we make have shown that players get more kicks, they start passing more, they are better able to make better decisions with less pressure, they start to function better as a team, while progressively learning the rules across the age groups in a way that will set them up for future success should they continue into more competitive environments.

Our environment is not perfect, and it never will be, but we are proud of the work and adjustments we have made over the last several years where we have seen significantly increased participation with great atmospheres around our games.

## WHAT WE VALUE

Our primary focus is on building a fun inclusive environment where children of all abilities can come together to play with their friends and have fun playing a team sport.

- be Friendly
- be Understanding
- create a Nurturing learning environment