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Growing the Game

Basketball Development Reimagined

Building Stronger Foundations
for Tomorrow's Players

Ages 4-12

2025/2026



Introduction

Over the past few seasons, we've seen a growing need to rethink how we support young basketballers at our club. As participation increases and more players join with a wide range of experience and confidence, it's become clear that our current development model no longer meets the needs of our families or our athletes.

We've heard consistent feedback from coaches, parents, and players: kids need more structured teaching, more balanced teams, and a more supportive, learning-focused environment—especially in the early years.

In response, we're excited to announce the full relaunch of our Junior Development Program. This redesigned model introduces a clear, age-based pathway for kids ages 4 to 12, reintroduces the national Ford Aussie Hoops program, and places learning and long-term development at the heart of everything we do.

Ford Aussie Hoops: Our Starting Point

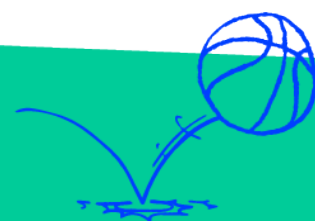
We're proud to announce that we have officially rejoined Ford Aussie Hoops, Basketball Australia's national introductory program for young children. It provides a nationally recognised, age-appropriate entry point for children and aligns with our club's goals to:

- Deliver fun, structured, and engaging basketball experiences for beginners, aligned with the national curriculum
- Build a consistent pathway for young players from their first bounce through to competitive and representative play
- Support parents and coaches with clear resources, training plans, session guides, online tools and national standards
- Create a strong foundation for player retention, enjoyment, and long-term success

Rejoining Aussie Hoops is not just a box tick – it's a statement of our commitment to doing junior basketball the right way: fun, welcoming, structured, development-focused, and nationally supported.



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Overarching Changes

Creating Connection Through Custom Gear

One of the exciting upgrades is providing players with our official participation merch that help make a child's first basketball experience fun and memorable.

To build and strengthen our club identity, we're developing our own custom-branded Blue Mountains Aussie Hoops gear that will include:

- Blue Mountains-branded reversible jerseys
- Branded basketballs for Aussie Hoops participants

This initiative is about more than just uniforms—it's about creating a shared sense of belonging and pride from the very first session. When children see themselves as part of something bigger, they feel more confident, more engaged, and more likely to stay involved.

Our goal is for every Aussie Hoops participant to feel like they're part of the Blue Mountains Basketball family from day one.

Age-Based Progression, Not Just “Under” Age Groups

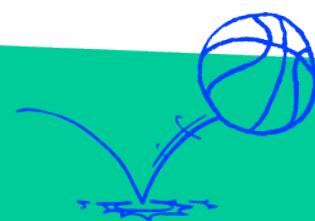
As part of our commitment to player-first development, our development programs will now be organised by stage of development rather than strictly by the “under” age model used in competitions. This means:

- Players will be grouped by developmental readiness and general age range:
 - Rookies: 4–6
 - Rising Stars: 7–9
 - All-Stars: 10–12
- Top-age players (e.g. those turning 12) can remain in the All-Stars programs if they are still building confidence or skill—without being pushed prematurely into U14 competition.
- At the same time, players who are ready for more challenge—regardless of their age within a group—will be encouraged and supported to move into higher level programs or competitive play.

This flexible, age-based approach ensures that every player receives the right level of support at the right time, with the goal of long-term success and enjoyment in the sport.



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Term-Based Delivery – A More Flexible, Aligned Approach

Starting from the Summer 2025–26 season, all Skills Sessions and Development Academies will shift from season-long formats to term-based programs. This change is designed to bring greater flexibility, better alignment with the Aussie Hoops curriculum, and more responsive management of player development.

Why We're Making This Change

Under the current season-long structure, players are typically grouped for extended periods (up to 18+ weeks), which can limit our ability to adapt to individual growth, team dynamics, and changing family schedules. By transitioning to term-based blocks (approximately 8–10 weeks), we can:

- More closely align our Skills Sessions with the Aussie Hoops term curriculum
- Provide a clearer entry point for new players each term, making participation easier and more accessible for families
- Create more natural opportunities for players to progress between tiers as their skills develop
- Refresh and rotate academy team groupings each term to ensure balanced development, new learning environments, and diverse peer interactions
- Offer targeted development themes each term (e.g. ball-handling, defense, team play), allowing coaches to deliver focused, age-appropriate content

Program Delivery by Term

Each term will operate as a self-contained development cycle, including:

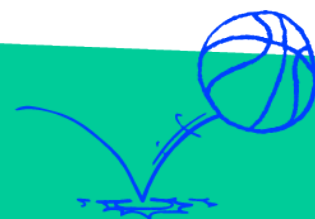
- A defined start and end date
- A specific skill focus aligned with the player's stage of development
- Rotation opportunities for academy teams and session groupings
- Flexibility for players to enter, exit, or move between programs as needed

This approach also supports greater engagement from coaches, who can plan and reflect on shorter learning blocks, and from families, who can commit term-by-term based on their child's readiness and availability.

Overall, this shift to term-based delivery enhances the quality, responsiveness, and structure of our programs—ensuring each child receives the right support at the right time on their basketball journey.



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Fees & Gear – Transparent, Tiered, and Great Value

As part of this shift, program fees will move from a low, season-long flat rate to a per-term structure. While this will result in a modest increase in total annual cost for regular participants, the value and quality of the offering will be significantly higher. Key improvements include:

- Smaller coach-to-player ratios
- Capped group sizes to protect session quality
- Term-by-term flexibility—families only commit to one term at a time
- More sessions offered across the week to better fit busy family schedules
- Enhanced coaching, curriculum design, and real-time player feedback
- Consistency with how other basketball clubs deliver their development programs

We are confident this model offers far greater value for our families and a vastly improved development experience for our players.

Gear Included for New Participants

All participants commencing in Term 4 will receive a pack of Blue Mountains-branded gear as part of their enrolment – including a reversible singlet and a basketball.

This gear will be provided free of charge to all players in Term 4 as part of our initial launch, thanks to sponsorship support.

All gear is yours to keep and will follow you throughout your time in the development pathway. Players will be encouraged to continue using their gear term to term as part of building a strong and unified club identity.

As children grow or progress through the age groups, larger-sized uniforms and basketballs will be available for one-off purchase as needed. This approach keeps ongoing costs down for families while ensuring every player has access to equipment that fits and supports their development.

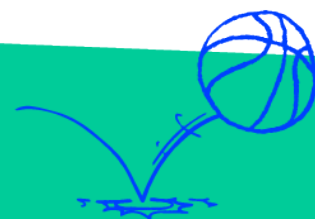
From Term 1 2026 onward:

- New participants will pay a New Starter Fee that includes their full gear pack
- Returning participants will pay a Returning Player Fee at a lower rate, as they already have their gear

This model ensures new players feel welcomed and included, while keeping ongoing participation affordable for returning families.



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New Development Program Structure

Our junior development model is built around two core program types—Skills Sessions and Development Academies—each designed to meet players where they are in their basketball journey:

- **Skills Sessions** are non-competitive, training-focused programs more akin to basketball workshops than games. They focus on building strong fundamentals, motor skills, and game understanding through drills, skill challenges, and fun activities—without structured gameplay.
- **Development Academies** are the next step in the pathway. These sessions combine targeted skill work with modified, coach-supported gameplay. While still non-competitive, the focus here shifts toward applying skills in a game-like context. Coaches actively guide players during games, with the freedom to pause play to teach, correct, and reinforce learning. This format helps bridge the gap between training and competition, ensuring players are prepared—physically and mentally—for their next step, whether that's domestic competition or representative basketball.

Research shows that players at this age learn best when they can experiment, make mistakes, and receive real-time guidance. By combining training and games, this model helps players:

- Better understand how skills translate to game situations
- Build confidence and game awareness
- Stay engaged and motivated without the pressure of winning

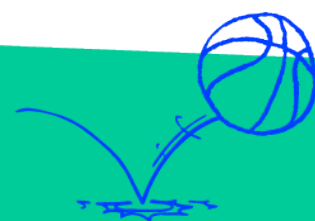
Skills Sessions

We're expanding and refining our weekly skills sessions to better support players at every stage of their journey. This new structure introduces three dedicated programs designed to match developmental needs more precisely:

- **Rookies (Ages 4–6):** A fun and active introduction to basketball focused on movement, coordination, and simple ball skills. Perfect for our youngest players who are just starting out.
- **Rising Stars (Ages 7–9):** Designed for primary school players, these sessions build essential skills such as dribbling, passing, shooting, and basic teamwork in a fun, engaging setting.
- **All Stars (Ages 10–12):** Targeted at older beginners or developing players, these sessions provide more structured skill development, introducing players to game situations and concepts.



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Each age group will have its own sessions, specifically tailored to their stage of development, with a focus on:

- Building core basketball skills (dribbling, passing, shooting, movement)
- Developing game understanding through fun, engaging activities
- Supporting new players in a non-competitive, encouraging environment

To ensure quality coaching and individual attention, we will be capping numbers in each session to maintain a strong coach-to-player ratio. In addition, we are aiming to run more sessions across the week to offer families greater flexibility and make it easier for every child to participate consistently.

These programs are ideal for beginners, returning players, and anyone looking to strengthen their foundation before or alongside academy play.

Rising Star Academy

Our new Rising-Star Academy is a formal 'Mini-Ball' program that will replace our current U10 Learn to Play program.

This new initiative is designed to help young players in the Rising Stars age group (7-9) make the transition from skills training to real-game scenarios in a supportive, coach-led environment. This stage acts as a bridge between learning the basics and playing the game.

Each weekly session (to be run on Saturday mornings) includes two key components:

1. Skill Session (20 minutes):

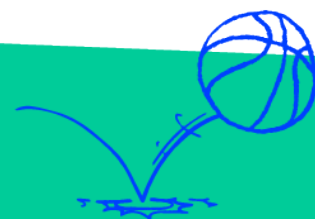
Before each game, players will take part in a structured, age-appropriate training block. This allows coaches to focus on fundamental skills and team concepts such as passing, spacing, defending, and movement without the ball. Sessions are progressive, building on prior weeks and giving players time to absorb and apply new techniques.

2. Modified Games (20 minutes):

Following the skill session, players will participate in structured, coach-supervised games. These games use simplified rules designed to promote learning rather than competition. Coaches may pause the game at appropriate moments to correct positioning, reinforce decision-making, or highlight teachable moments.



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Key Features:

- All games are non-scoring and non-laddered: the focus is entirely on development
- Coaches are active and involved on the court to support learning
- Rules are adapted to support game understanding (e.g., ensuring all players handle the ball, encouraging team play)
- New teams are created each week, giving players the opportunity to play with a wide range of teammates and styles

The Rising Start Academy will also serve as a valuable learning space for our junior referees. With its low-pressure, coach-supported environment and modified rules, this program offers a perfect setting for young officials to gain confidence, practice mechanics, and receive feedback while contributing to a positive game experience.

All Star Academy

We are transitioning our existing U12 competition on a Saturday morning into a Coach-Led Academy for the All Star age group (10-12). This is a short-term but essential step in building the foundation for long-term player success.

Why the Change?

Over the past few seasons, we've seen that many players entering the U12 competition arrive with inconsistent levels of skill, game understanding, and confidence. For some, it's their first time in structured gameplay. For others, their early development hasn't prepared them for the speed, complexity, and competitiveness of the traditional U12 format.

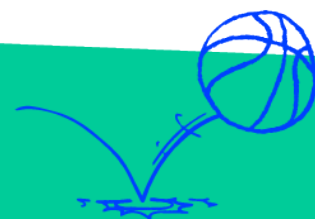
This has resulted in:

- Games that are dominated by a few stronger players while others struggle to contribute
- Coaches being unable to address individual learning needs in real time
- Frustration or disengagement among newer or less confident players
- A growing gap between participation and readiness for representative basketball

Additionally, the "create-your-own-team" model has unintentionally created a barrier for new or less-connected players. When players form their own teams, new children or those without a peer group already playing can feel left out or unsure how to get involved. This discourages participation and makes it harder for us to place players in balanced, inclusive teams.



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How It Works

Each All-Star Academy session will consist of:

1. Skill Session (30 minutes):

Building on our 'Hoops Hub' sessions that were introduced in Term 2, all teams will begin with a structured training block led by a qualified coach. These sessions focus on reinforcing key individual and team skills: ball-handling under pressure, passing and moving, defense, offensive spacing, rebounding, and basic team strategy.

2. Coach-Supervised Games (30 minutes):

Following training, teams will play a full-court 5v5 game. However, unlike traditional competitions, these games will be led by a coach who can pause play at any time to:

- Reinforce key concepts
- Correct positioning or decision-making
- Ensure all players are actively involved
- Encourage team play and communication

Games will be non-competitive (no scoring or ladder) and officiated in a development-friendly way. This allows players and referees to learn from their mistakes without pressure, and gives coaches the ability to teach in context—where learning sticks best. The focus is entirely on helping players apply what they've learned, make better decisions, and grow their confidence in a real game setting.

We will also be moving to a club-formed team model, to ensure that:

- Every player is welcomed and placed into a team, regardless of background or social circle
- Teams are balanced based on skill level and experience

Why This Matters Now

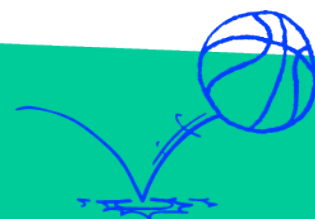
This structure is a deliberate response to the gaps we've identified at U12 level. Until our younger players (4-9) have progressed through our new development model and arrive at the U12 level with stronger fundamentals, this interim step gives all current players—regardless of background—a chance to catch up, learn, and thrive.

It ensures that:

- All players get regular coaching and targeted feedback
- We reduce skill and confidence gaps across the competition
- More players are retained because they're engaged and supported
- Coaches are empowered to teach in game-like situations



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Looking Ahead

As players move up through the new development pathway, we expect to see stronger foundational skills, better game sense, and more consistent player readiness. Over time, this will allow us to gradually transition the All-Star Academy back toward a more traditional competition model—without compromising development.

In the meantime, the All-Star Academy serves as a critical stepping stone for players, coaches, and families—giving every child a fair shot at success and enjoyment in the game.

Representative Players in the Development Program

U12 Rep Players in the All-Star Academy

We recognise that many of our most dedicated and talented players in the 9-11 age bracket are also members of our U12 Magic representative program. These players play an important role in our club's culture and success, and we've carefully designed our development structure to provide an ideal space for rep athletes to continue refining their skills, reinforce fundamentals, and take on mentoring roles alongside peers still progressing through the pathway.

Participation Expectations

All U12 Magic representative players are expected to take part in the All Star Academy. This is not just about skill development – it's also about reinforcing club values of inclusion, teamwork, and leadership. Their participation helps in several key ways:

- It creates stronger, more balanced sessions that lift the standard for everyone
- It gives rep players a chance to reinforce and consolidate core skills in a teaching-focused setting
- It positions them as role models and leaders within their domestic teams
- It ensures continuity between domestic and representative styles of play and coaching

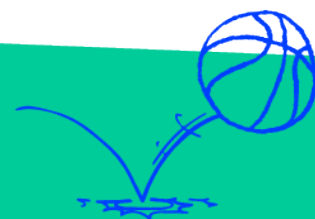
To further support their growth and remove barriers, participation in the All-Stars Skills Academy will be free for all current representative players.

Meeting the Need for Challenge

We also understand that rep players need the opportunity to be challenged beyond foundational development. To ensure they continue to grow, our Magic U12 representative teams will also be entered into the U14 domestic competition for their competitive play.



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This dual-participation model offers the best of both worlds:

- All Star Academy: Skill reinforcement, leadership, and learning in a structured, coach-led environment
- U14 Domestic Competition: Increased speed, complexity, and competitive challenge that reflects the level rep players are training for

The Benefits

This structure allows our representative players to:

- Sharpen decision-making and execution under pressure in U14s
- Maintain and model foundational discipline and habits in U12s
- Receive coaching that's aligned across domestic and representative settings

We are intentional about this integration. Having rep players involved helps set the standard for behaviour, focus, and work ethic – and makes the pathway to higher levels visible and aspirational for all players.

U16–U18 Rep Players as Development Coaches – Building Leadership On and Off the Court

As part of our commitment to building a strong, connected, and sustainable club culture, all U16–U18 Magic representative players will be expected to contribute to our junior development programs in coaching and mentoring roles.

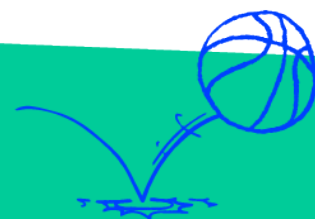
Starting in 2026, rep players in the U16 and U18 age groups will take part in scheduled coaching assistant placements across our Skills Sessions and Development Academies. This will form an integral part of their involvement in the club and their own development as players, leaders, and role models.

Why We're Doing This

- Leadership & Personal Growth: Supporting younger players in a coaching or mentoring role builds confidence, communication skills, patience, and maturity—traits that benefit rep players both on and off the court.
- Club Culture & Connection: This initiative strengthens the bond between age groups and fosters a sense of shared purpose across the club. When younger players see rep athletes involved and invested, it builds excitement and aspiration.
- Deeper Game Understanding: Teaching others is one of the most effective ways to reinforce your own understanding of the game. By assisting with sessions, rep players gain insight into skill progression, technique, and court awareness from a coaching perspective.
- Sustainable Coaching Pathways: By involving senior juniors in our delivery model, we're also building a future pipeline of coaches who understand our culture, values, and teaching philosophies from firsthand experience.



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What It Looks Like

Rep players will be scheduled to assist in specific development groups. They will work alongside qualified development coaches who provide structure and support

Tasks may include demonstrating skills, helping manage drills, supporting small groups, or assisting with warm-ups and transitions

Over time, players may have the opportunity to step into junior coaching roles or complete formal accreditation

This model gives every rep player the opportunity to give back, grow as a leader, and leave a lasting impact on the next generation of Magic athletes—while strengthening the fabric of our club as a whole.

Coach Development

Supporting Parents, Building Leaders

Our club has always been supported by passionate and dedicated parent coaches. While this grassroots involvement is a strength, we know that many parent coaches would benefit from more structured guidance, training, and support.

With the introduction of our redesigned development pathway, we're creating a clear opportunity to grow and support our coaching community.

All of our development programs will be staffed by experienced coaches however these coaches won't just lead sessions – they will also mentor and support new and aspiring coaches in a hands-on, practical environment.

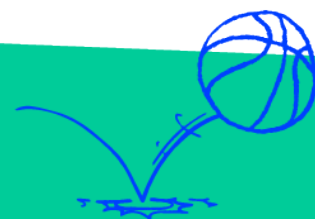
How it works:

- Parents or volunteers interested in coaching can join any development session as a coaching assistant
- They will work alongside experienced development coaches who provide real-time guidance, session structure, and feedback
- Coaches-in-training can gradually take on more responsibility as their confidence and capability grow
- We will also provide access to coaching clinics, session plans, and online resources to support ongoing learning

This “coach-the-coach” model gives our parent community a welcoming and low-pressure way to get involved, learn best practices, and build their coaching confidence. Over time, it will help us develop a deeper, more capable coaching pool that benefits all players—whether they're just starting or stepping into representative basketball.

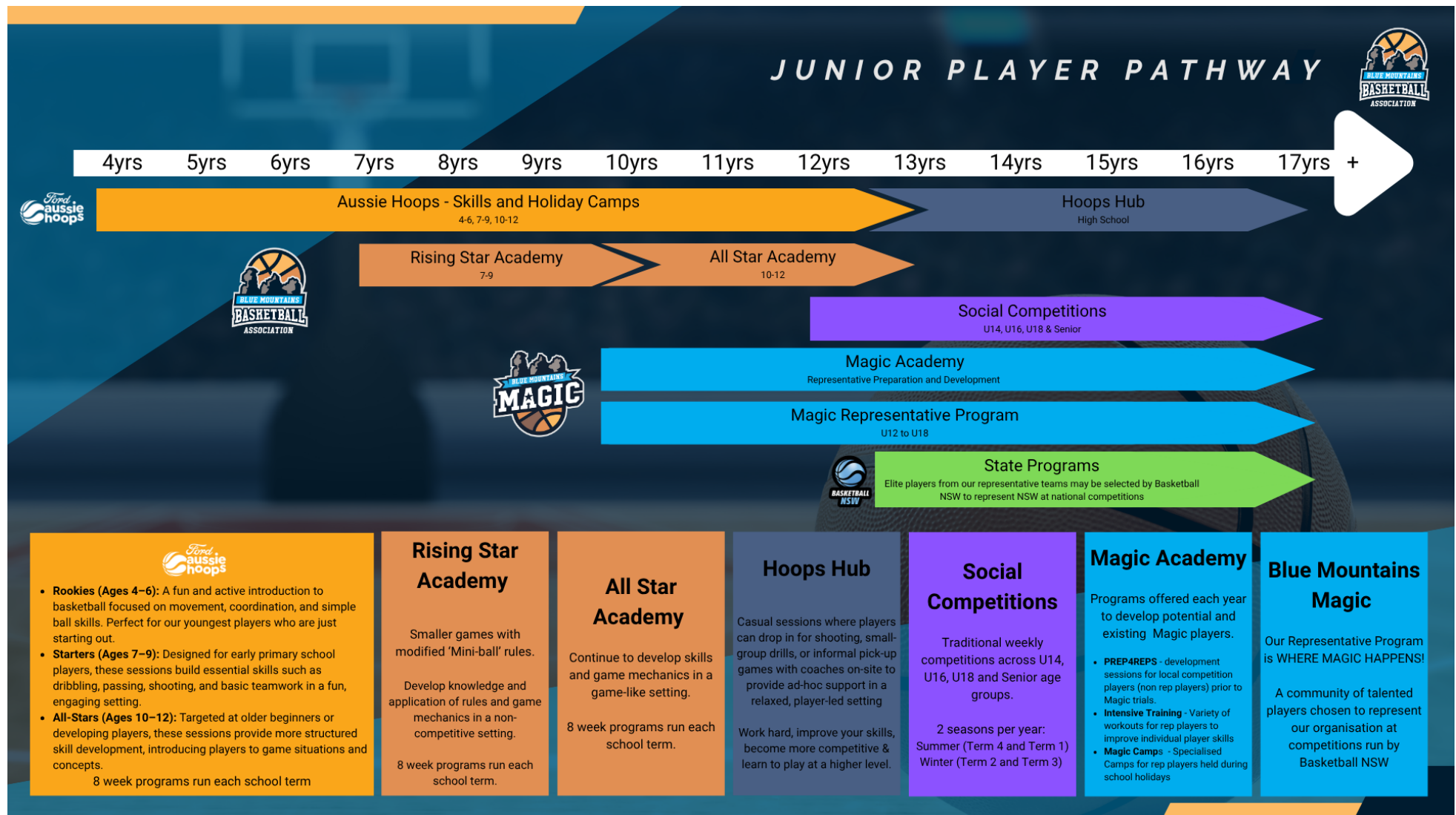


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Blue Mountains Basketball – Junior Player Pathway

To help families, coaches, and players understand how our new structure supports long-term growth, we've developed the Blue Mountains Basketball – Junior Player Pathway. This visual guide outlines the progression from Aussie Hoops through to development academies and representative opportunities. It shows how each stage builds on the last – ensuring that players develop the skills, confidence, and game understanding they need to thrive at every level of the game. Whether your child is picking up a ball for the first time or aiming for representative play, the pathway provides a clear, supportive roadmap for their basketball journey.





Transition Plan

Our redesigned junior development pathway will roll out in staged phases across Terms 3 and 4 of 2025, with further expansion planned in 2026. This plan ensures a smooth transition from our current structure to better support players, families, and coaches at every stage of their journey.

Term 3 2025 – Early Implementation Begins

Rookies Skills Sessions (Ages 4–6)

- New introductory program running Saturdays from 12:00–1:00pm
- 8-week pilot beginning Week 2 of Term 3
 - Commencing 02 August and concluding 20 September

Rising Stars Skills Sessions (Ages 7–9)

- New Tuesday sessions at 5:00pm
- 8-week pilot beginning Week 2 of Term 3
 - Commencing 29 July and concluding 16 September

All-Stars Skills Sessions (Ages 10–12)

- Existing Friday Skill Builder sessions rebranded as the All-Stars program
- No other changes this term – will continue as is, but will start to introduce the Aussie Hoops curriculum to provide more structure to these sessions.

Hoops Hub and U12 Competition Continues

- Current winter format will be maintained through Term 3

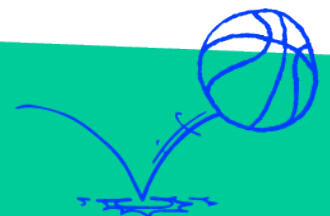
Term 4 2025 – Full Program Launch

The official launch of our full junior development program will coincide with the start of the Summer 2025–26 domestic season. This timing ensures a clean transition between winter and summer basketball

- Development Academies Begin (Rising Stars & All Stars)
- Uniforms & Custom Gear will be ready in time for summer season start
- New term-based delivery and fee structure
- Skills Sessions will continue (Tuesday, Friday and Saturday)



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Looking Ahead to 2026 – Program Growth & Flexibility

- Weekday Rookies Session (TBD)
 - Goal to add a second session during a weekday pending demand and court availability
- Additional Rising Stars and All Stars Sessions (TBD)
 - Planning to add a second midweek option for each age group (after school/evenings) to improve access and flexibility for families
- Hoops Hub Evolves
 - Relaunch the Hoops Hub as a flexible, term-based Open Gym format
 - Published calendar of casual sessions where players can drop in for shooting, small-group drills, or informal pick-up games
 - Coaches on-site to provide ad-hoc support in a relaxed, player-led setting

This phased rollout reflects our long-term commitment to delivering high-quality, development-first basketball experiences while meeting the evolving needs of our players and families.



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