



# From first kicks to lifelong football fans

From those taking their first kicks to their coaches, managers and supporters, McDonald's is helping shape the game

For many Kiwi kids, memories of junior football are stitched together with muddy boots, early morning kick-offs, and the thrill of earning a Player of the Day trophy. Those experiences are made better by a great experience of training and matches, and support from the sideline.

That foundation has been built stronger thanks to support by Macca's. McDonald's has just renewed its long-standing partnership with New Zealand Football, continuing a legacy of more than 25 years of support for junior and community grassroots football across Aotearoa.

It's not just the kids on the pitch who benefit. McDonald's is the biggest supporter of the community game, backing everyone from young players and volunteer coaches to referees, managers and whānau on the sidelines. Their support helps the game succeed at all levels – ensuring that football continues to grow and connect communities around New Zealand.

"The momentum behind football in New Zealand across community, emerging talent and the elite end of the sport is tremendous. Extending our partnership with New Zealand Football helps ensure that resources will get to the right place to support coaches and their players, and other members of the football whānau to keep football thriving," says

Simon Kenny, Head of Impact & Communications at McDonald's New Zealand.

That momentum is visible in the numbers. Since the last partnership extension in 2022, participation in junior football (ages 4 to 12) has increased by 20%. Youth football (ages 13-19) is up 18%, while female participation has jumped an impressive 27%. Community referees have increased by 43%, and more people than ever are attending referee courses – up 19%.

"There is excitement about football and futsal at all levels of the game. McDonald's long-term support and commitment to the game ensures that the great work of our clubs and federations is able to continue, and even more players are given opportunities to get involved," says Andrew Pragnell, CEO of New Zealand Football.

Programmes supported by McDonald's are tailored to each age group, helping to create a fun, accessible experience for all. From McDonald's First Kicks (ages 4 to 6) and Fun Football & Futsal (7 to 8) to Mini Football & Futsal (9 to 12), players are offered coaching and games suited to their stage of development. Since 2011, junior football participation has increased 55 percent, with more than 62,000 kids now involved.

While the players benefit, it's the volunteer coaches, managers and supporters that are Macca's focus, primarily with resources and equipment. More than one million items have been distributed to more than 400 clubs, including footballs, grip socks, bottles, certificates, trophies and other essential gear that brings game day to life. Each year the McDonald's Junior Coach of the Year and Referee of the Year recognise people around the country.

McDonald's has also helped enable New Zealand

Football to utilise CoachMate – a digital coaching tool now used by more than 15,000 people, including 8,000 coaches. Designed to build confidence and reduce youth drop-off from sport, CoachMate gives coaches the tools and knowledge they need to make football a positive experience for young players. Over half of CoachMate users say it is "very helpful", and 15 percent call it a "game-changer".

Another example is McDonald's support of football is its work with the Wellington Phoenix to launch the Macca's Junior Nix programme. As the club's official family partner, the Junior Nix was created to inspire and support the next generation of Nix football fans. The initiative offers every under-16 footballer registered with a Capital Federation football club a free season pass to all Wellington Phoenix home games - including both men's and women's matches. Since launching two years ago, the programme has attracted over 3,500 members and is now the most popular junior membership in the A-Leagues.

Football's growth in New Zealand is the result of thousands of small acts of support – driving to training, cheering on the sidelines, filling drink bottles and tying lots of boot laces. McDonald's recognises the importance of those moments and the people behind them.

After 25 years of partnership with New Zealand Football, the message is clear: the game is stronger when the community stands together. And with more growth still to come, there's never been a better time to play, coach, support or simply show up.

To learn more or try CoachMate for your team, visit: [mcdonalds.co.nz/learn/responsibility/maccas-community](https://mcdonalds.co.nz/learn/responsibility/maccas-community) or [www.coachmate.sport](https://www.coachmate.sport)