

Australian Rules Football Skills Guide

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FUNDAMENTALS OF SKILL TEACHING

Like all sports, Australian Football is made up of diverse and varying components. It should be simple and fun for juniors and physically challenging and rewarding for developing players. By following this basic coaching and teaching philosophy (S.P.I.R), those passing on the various skills will be rewarded, just like the players they are teaching.

Show	Name the Skill Demonstrate three times Provide three coaching points (Maximum).
Practise	Have players practise immediately via an appropriate activity.
Instruct	Give feedback on their performance based on what they have been taught.
Reward	Encourage and reward effort and achievement.

KICKING

Kicking is probably the most important individual skill in Australian Football. The basic skill of kicking should be taught at a young age and any faults rectified before it is too late. It is important players learn the right technique while they are young. Later in their career they will demonstrate the ability to

- a) kick under pressure
- b) pass the ball accurately to a teammate
- c) use the ball to the best advantage of their side when kicking from a set position.

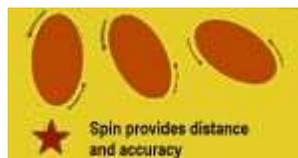
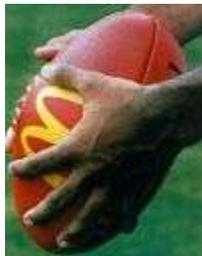
MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- Line up your body with your target.
- Have your head slightly bent over the ball.
- Hold the ball over the thigh of the kicking leg.
- Guide the ball down with one hand.
- Point your toes at your target – see the ball hit the foot.
- Follow through straight towards the target.

THE DROP PUNT

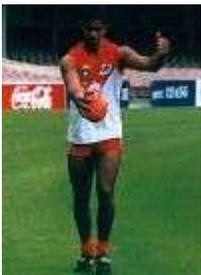
1. *The Grip*

The fingers are spread evenly along each side of the ball, with thumbs extending to the lacing. The grip is the same for both left and right foot kicks.



2. *The Release*

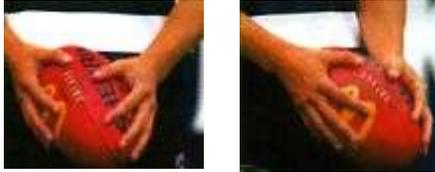
The ball is guided down and is kicked on the bottom point, along the lower laces of the boot. It should spin backwards, end over end.



THE TORPEDO PUNT

1. *The Grip*

The ball is held on an angle across the body. For a right foot kick, the left hand is slightly forward and the right hand slightly behind the lacing. For a left foot kick, the hand positions are reversed.



2. *The Release*

The ball is guided down at a slight angle to the ground, and is also angled across the kicking leg. When the foot makes contact with the ball, the ball should spin in a spiral motion.



THE BANANA KICK (CHECKSIDE PUNT)

1. *The Grip*

The ball is held like a reverse torpedo punt, with the right hand forward for a right foot kick and the opposite for the left foot kick.



2. *The Release*

The ball is guided down so that it drops at an angle across the boot. The boot makes contact under the right side of the ball, causing a curved spin on the ball.



The banana kick is generally used when shooting for goal from close to the boundary line, near the behind post.

FIXING FAULTS

Faults that generally occur with young footballers include:

- Player leaning back too far
- Dropping the ball with two hands
- Throwing the ball into the air prior to contact
- Trying to kick the ball too hard
- Throwing the ball on to the kicking foot
- Ball spinning before hitting boot

There are a number of remedial techniques designed to overcome this ball guidance problem.

1. Bouncing is an excellent aid to kicking since it teaches the guiding of the ball down with one hand.



2. The one hand technique can also be helpful. This involves holding the ball underneath with one hand and then releasing it in a vertical position by simply taking the hand away.



Always use a football that is appropriate in size to your age group.

MASTER CLASS

1. *The Approach*

The arms are extended to a natural but not strained distance from the body. The ball moves with the hands in the approach, but the side to side movement should be minimal. Bend forward so you are looking directly down on to the ball. The ball is carried over the thigh of the kicking leg. Keep moving in a straight line to your target.



2. *The Release*

Immediately prior to release, the ball is brought up to about waist height. The hand on the same side as the kicking leg guides the ball down at the correct angle to the foot.



3. *Contact*

The foot meets the ball when it is approximately knee height. The foot should have a straight instep on contact with the ball. At contact, the eyes should "see the foot kick the ball". A natural movement of the opposite arm out to the side keeps balance. Hand should be at shoulder height.



4. ***The Follow Through***

The follow through should be straight to the target. Continue moving for a couple of steps towards your target.



HANDBALL

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, handball became one of the game's most important skills. Earlier, players were generally told never to handball in defence and to use handball only in emergency. In today's modern game, handball is a major attacking weapon as players run the ball from defence into offence. It is a skill that needs to be practised regularly and by watching experts you can improve your game.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- The ball must be gripped firmly with the platform hand and hit with a clenched fist. Players should have their eyes on the ball.
- Placing the thumb outside, not inside, the fingers forms the punching fist.
- The stance is nearly side-on to allow the punching arm to swing through freely. Knees slightly bent to maintain balance.
- For a right-handed handball, the left foot is forward, and vice versa for a left-handed handball.
- Punching arm also slightly bent
- After contact is made with the ball, the fist remains on the platform hand — "catch the fist".

TYPES OF HANDBALL

Floater

The ball is hit at the crossroads, ie, where the seams cross at the back of the ball. Once hit, the ball floats with no particular spin.



The floater is used in a game when a quick handball is required. It can be set up in the hands quickly.

Rocket

The ball is hit just above the crossroads. Note that the ball is set up at an upward angle in the platform hand. The ball will spin end over end backwards -- like a drop punt.



The rocket is ideal for long and accurate handpasses, and is easiest to catch in the hands.

Overspin

The ball is hit upwards just below the crossroads. The ball will spin forward – end over end. The ball should be held closer to the ground and the player does not always have to "Catch the fist".



The overspin is used to place the ball out in front of a teammate so that it runs along the ground.

FIXING FAULTS

Common faults in beginners include:

- Throwing the ball up off the platform hand before punching it.
- Dropping the platform hand away on impact.
- Punching the ball with the wrist area.
- Punching arm is too stiff and rigid – relax!

One method to keep the platform hand from leaving the ball is to have the coach hold the platform hand until the ball is hit from it. The same effect can be achieved by resting the player's platform hand on a partner's back.

Another technique, "catch your fist", is also useful. The player should grab his punching fist with his platform hand after hitting the ball. This stops you throwing the ball up and ensures you punch directly to your target and not across your body.



RUCKWORK

The role of the ruck player is a crucial one in Australian Football. A good ruck sets up play from a variety of contests such as the centre bounce or boundary throw-in. To create opportunities for their smaller, running players, it is important that a ruck has the skill to direct the ball to his teammate's best advantage.

The techniques involved in ruck work are needed to move the ball toward goal or to get the ball to teammates from a ball-up or boundary throw-in.



MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- At first, practise in a standing position extending to a run-in and jump
- Practise without opposition and then extend the practise to include an opponent.
- Hit with the palm and then later use the fist.
- Attempt two-handed hitting and then progress to one-handed palming.

PALMING



Palming to the front- one hand

1. Watch the ball through the air and leap off one foot using the arms and other leg to gain lift.
2. The arm is swung forward.
3. The ball is hit with the open palm and finger and directed with a straight follow-through.

Palming to the front – two hands

1. The hands are positioned behind the ball and the ball is hit with both open hands simultaneously.
2. The ball is directed with a follow-through towards the target.

Palming to the forehand

1. The player leaps for the ball and contacts it with the open palm.
2. In the hitting action, the arm should be straight with a follow-through in the desired direction across the body.

Palming to the backhand

1. The player leaps (off one leg or two) and the arm is bent immediately before impact.
2. The arm is straightened at the elbow and the ball directed to the backhand side with the open hand.

Palming over the back

1. The player leaps and with a straight arm reaches forward and overhead.
2. The ball is hit with an open hand over the shoulder towards the target.

CENTRE BOUNCE

- Jump off one leg
- Turn body sideways to protect yourself
- Hit with an outstretched arm at highest point of jump

MARKING

One of the most spectacular features of Australian Football is marking, particularly the high mark. However, it is just as important to be able to pull in a safe chest mark on a consistent basis without fumbling the ball. Like all skills, marking needs to be practised. No matter what your size, there will always be a situation in a game where you are in a position to mark the ball

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. Eyes must be focused on the ball all the way from the player's boot to your hands.
2. Position your body in line with the flight of the ball.
3. Move forward to meet the ball; never wait for it to come to you.
4. Skilful players should take the ball in their hands with their fingers spread and thumbs close together. Beginners should use the chest.

Arm or chest mark

1. Keep your eyes on the ball and line up the body with the flight of the ball.



2. The fingers and hands are extended --- palms up. Tuck the elbows in to the side.



3. The ball is taken on the hands and arms and guided to the chest.



4. The ball is hugged tightly to the chest. This is an important marking style if the ball is wet or muddy.



Hand Mark

Skilled players should practise taking the ball in the hands at all times, in preference to letting it hit the chest. This will help quick disposal and prevent opponents from punching the ball from behind.

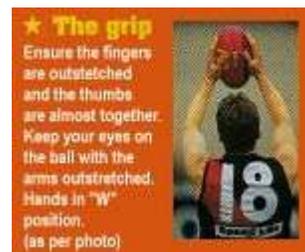


MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- Eyes must be on the flight of the ball
- The fingers should be outstretched, pointing towards the ball. The thumbs are positioned behind the ball.
- The arms must be extended – "Long Arms".
- The ball is firmly gripped in the fingers.
- Ensure your body is behind the flight of the ball.

Overhead Mark

This is the mark fans and commentators love to see. It takes great skill and athleticism to launch yourself in the air, but a consistent high mark can inspire teammates and bring other players into the game.



MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- Line your body up with the flight of the ball. Keep your "eyes on the ball".
- Jump off one foot and swing the other knee up to gain maximum height.
- Eyes are kept on the ball, fingers are outstretched and thumbs almost together.
- The ball is met slightly in front of the head with arms extended – "long arms". It should be firmly gripped in the fingers.

GENERAL SKILLS

PICK UP: MOVING BALL

Many different situations occur during a game when the ball must be picked up off the ground. Young players need to become competent at meeting and handling a moving ball.

1. The body is in line behind the path of the ball in a semi-crouched position.
2. The arms and hands are extended with the fingers almost touching the ground, palms towards ball.
3. The ball is picked up cleanly in two hands. The elbows are kept close together.
4. The ball is then brought into the hands for disposal. Eyes on the ball at all times.



PICK UP: STATIONARY BALL

One-Handed Pick Up

1. The ball is approached to the side.
2. The player runs slightly past the ball then swings one arm down with his hand scooping under the ball.
3. The free arm can be used to steady the ball, once it is picked up.



Two-Handed Pick-Up

1. The ball is approached from the side.
2. As the player draws level with the ball, he bends down and picks up the ball cleanly with two hands.



General Coaching Hints

Begin with:

- a two-handed pickup and progress to a one-handed pickup
- a slow pace, and then build up the speed.
- no opposition, and progress to practise with opposition.

The one-handed pickup is more difficult than the two-handed, but can be done with no loss of speed.

The players should be instructed to look at the bottom half of the ball and to move the arm through quickly.

Insist on a two-handed attempt for most players, using the body as a last resort if the ball is over-run.

HAND DRIBBLING

The skill of hand dribbling - or tapping the ball along the ground in front - is a necessary component of picking up and is a useful tactic in a game. Often a player cannot pick up the ball cleanly or is in danger of being tackled from behind by an opponent.

The ball is tapped out three to five metres in front and the player can accelerate to get clear of his opponent before picking up. This is also useful when a number of players are contesting the ball.



General coaching hints

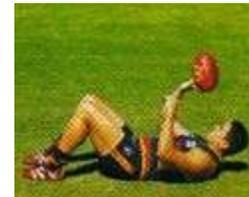
Begin with:

- Hand dribbling without an opponent and then introduce opposition
- A slow speed and then build up to a fast speed
- The ball rolling slowly away from the player and then moving faster with unpredictable bounce
- Use both hands and keep your body behind the ball

BALL HANDLING

When learning skills it is important to handle the ball as much as possible. A football is an odd shape and the more familiar you become with the ball, the easier it will be to master the skills. You won't always have someone to practise with, so these drills can be done before or after training or in your spare time.

1. Lay on your back and using both hands tap or throw the ball from hand to hand. Vary the height and speed of the throws, as you become more competent. This is great for hand-eye coordination and learning how to mark effectively.



2. Pass the ball in a figure eight in and out of the legs. This will develop your grip strength, making it easier to mark, handball and guide the ball on to your foot when kicking.



RUNNING

Running has become a major skill in modern day football with the emphasis now on running with the ball to maintain possession. Similarly, defensive and offensive players are required to run and chase. There is great value in teaching youngsters how to run correctly, in order to improve their running speed.

Running speed and acceleration are the product of stride length and frequency. The distance covered with each stride taken and the speed with which the legs move are key factors in sprinting.

Good running technique involves:

- Moving arms and legs in a straight line and not across the body
- Slight forward body lean
- Keeping head and trunk steady, eyes looking ahead
- High knee lifts



BOUNCING THE BALL

Players are required to bounce the ball every fifteen metres when running.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- The ball is held slightly on top by the bouncing hand
- The ball is pushed down with one hand
- The ball strikes the ground at an angle of about 45 degrees
- The ball is bounced far enough in front so that it will bounce into the player's hands as he runs forward.
- The distance at which the ball is thrown out in front is directly related to the player' speed - the faster he is running, the further out in front it must be thrown.



General coaching hints

Begin With:

- Standing and bouncing, and then extend to walking and bouncing
- Running in straight lines, and extend to weaving and dodging
- Add an opponent to chase
- Being able to bounce the ball with both hands will enable you to guide the ball down better and kick with either foot.

THE SIDE STEP



MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. Watch your opponent closely
2. Hold the ball out to the side as the opponent approaches
3. Push hard off the foot planted on the same side as the ball
4. Pull the ball back quickly as you move around the opponent
5. Ensure that you change direction and don't run in a straight line.

BLIND TURN

The blind turn is used to evade an opponent when the player is being chased from behind and you are heading away from the direction of your goal.



To turn to the left side:

1. As the opponent gets closer, hold the ball out to the right hand side.
2. Dig the right foot into the ground and push hard to step to the left-hand side as in the side step.
3. Pull the ball back "inside" towards your team's goal and accelerate quickly away.

THE DUMMY (FAKE)

The tactic known as "selling the dummy" is used when in possession of the ball to dodge an oncoming opponent.



MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- As the opponent approaches, shape to handball or kick in forward direction. The player must look in that direction, so as to give his opponent the impression that he will pass in that direction.
- As the opponent moves to smother the football, the player draws in the ball and moves around him by pushing off hard as in the side step.
- The player is then in the clear and can accelerate away past the opponent. Again, changing direction is important.

CHECKING SKILLS

All footballers, no matter what their position, must recognise the crucial role of defence. From the full-forward who must chase hard to the full-back who spoils a mark, they all contribute to the eventual success of your team.

Beginners should practise the skills that result in your team regaining possession such as:

- Spoiling marks
- Tackling

Competent players can add these components to their game:

- Shepherding
- Blocking
- Smothering

It is important to practise all these skills correctly so that you don't give away free kicks.

SMOTHERING

A good smother can deflate the spirit of a player who thinks they are about to get an easy kick. It also lifts the side that has made the smother because of great courage it takes putting your body on the line.

1. The hands are brought from the hip level, close together.
2. "Shoot from the hips" with the fingers pointing straight ahead.
3. The arms and hands are extended at about 45 degrees over the kicking boot.
4. Smother the ball when it is on or just left the kicker's boot.



The smotherer must keep his eyes on the ball at all times.

TACKLING

From Behind

Approach the player who has the ball, from one side, so he is not pushed in the back. The head should be placed to one side. The player is grabbed on the arms just above the elbows and then swung or spun off balance.



From the Front

The tackler approaches the player with his arms at waist level. The tackler places his head to one side of the player, with his chin tucked into his chest. He then pins the arms of the other player and spins or turns him off balance. Your shoulder and arm make first contact to an opponent's chest.

Ensure your head is behind the opponent's back and out of any danger. Use your body weight to slow down your opponent.



General Coaching Hints

- Begin with the opponent stationary and the tackler walking in.
- Extend to the tackler jogging in.
- Players may be tackled below the shoulders and above the knees (when in possession of the ball).

BUMPING (HIP-AND-SHOULDER)

A player can legally hip-and-shoulder (bump) an opponent when the ball is within five metres.

- Lean towards the opponent, pushing hard from the foot furthest from the opponent.
- The arm is bent, with the elbow tucked into the side.
- Make contact with the shoulder and upper arm – preferably when an opponent is settled on one foot, so he is easier to unbalance.
- The bumping player should keep his feet on the ground at all times.
- Only bump when an opponent does not have the ball. If he does have the ball – apply a tackle.



SPOILING

Spoiling is knocking the ball out of the hands of an opponent who is attempting to mark. It is an effective method of preventing an opponent from marking or gaining possession of the ball. Once again, when spoiling, especially from behind, the spoiling player must not infringe by making contact with his opponent's back, head or shoulders. If performed correctly, spoiling can be an attacking skill, whereby the ball can be placed to the advantage of teammates.

Chest mark spoil

- Approach the opponent from one side.
- Keep your eyes on the ball.
- Punch the ball with a clenched fist before it reaches the opponent's arm.

Overhead mark spoil



- This spoil should be used when a player is not confident of marking.
- The fist should be clenched and arms outstretched ("long arms") at point of contact with the ball.
- As with marking, the spoiling player's run must be timed to gain maximum height with the arm following straight through the flight of the ball.
- Be careful not to put the other hand on the back of an opponent's neck (this is an infringement).

SHEPHERDING

The aim of a shepherd is for a player to block the approach of an opponent to stop him making contact with the player's teammate.

A shepherd is achieved by using the arms and body to form a barrier to protect a teammate. The fingers are outstretched with the arms spread below shoulder level. An opponent can be legally shepherded by placing the body between the player and the ball, as long as the ball is not more than five metres away. Bend your knees and be strong but do not hold or grab your opponent.

A shepherd can also be used when contesting an overhead mark. The player shepherding must communicate clearly with his teammate, telling him he is all clear to mark.

