

CoachingEdge

Incorporating Coaching Update | VOLUME 25, No 2 December 2011

SIMON GOODWIN

How to hurt
the opposition
as a half-back
flanker



EXPERT OBSERVER

Mike Sheahan
tells what he's
learnt over 40
years of watching
the game's best
coaches



Master Coach

Lessons from
the late, great
Allan Jeans



CoachingEdge

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COVER: The late Allan Jeans was a four-time premiership coach, taking St Kilda to its only flag in 1966 and Hawthorn to the 1983, 1986 and 1989 premierships.

RIGHT: Former Adelaide captain Simon Goodwin is now as assistant coach at Essendon.

Jeans' extraordinary coaching legacy

▶ If you are a coach or player celebrating 2011 or are planning an assault on next season's premiership you will find a plethora of ideas in this edition of *Coaching Edge* to take you to the top of the football mountain.

We feature a tribute by Geoff Slattery to one of the greats of Australian Football, Allan Jeans, who sadly passed away in July. Jeans, the inaugural president of AFCA, was an expert manager of players and many of those under his tutelage express their sentiments on Jeans the man and coach.

As one coach passes, another emerges, and Simon Goodwin is already impressing good judges on his potential to become a successful senior coach. His paper on coaching half-back flankers reveals how the role of a running defender blends fundamentals that have stood the test of time with modern concepts.

Football has come a long way from the days when players simply turned up to train twice a week, did some end-to-end work and then some circle work. The late Dr Frank Pyke, former Victorian Institute of Sport chief, witnessed and directed many of the dramatic changes that have occurred in the way clubs have utilised sports science. His pioneering book *Football: The Scientific Way*, written with Brownlow medallist, Dr Ross Smith, was a catalyst for the development of coaches who looked outside traditional methods and sought more systematic and scientific approaches. In this edition,

Frank reflected on the changes that have occurred over the past 40 years in the use of sports science.

The media is a powerful influence on people's views on coaching. Have you ever wondered what qualifications journalists have for judging coaches? Do they really understand the coach's complex role. In Mike Sheahan's case, I'll think you'll find his passion for a game he played at a high level, coupled with his great listening skills, has enabled him to learn a lot about coaching during his career as a football writer. Mike, who has just retired, presents his views on the coaches he has seen which makes for interesting reading.

At some time we have all been a 'new kid on the block'. Inside, we examine the growing pains of being a newcomer to a club and provide some insights on how to better manage them.

No doubt we all have our own views on the key elements of football. However, our philosophies need constant updating. Danny Ryan outlines his five fundamentals of modern football. One of those fundamentals, decision-making is vital but difficult to measure, and Peel Thunder senior coach Trevor Williams addresses this issue in more detail.

But wait ... there's more! Kicking activities, part two of 'Coaching is a balancing act', plus regular features Media Watch and From the Ivory Tower and Beyond. So read on, enjoy and grow!

Ken Davis, Editor

Coaching Edge

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Media Watch

The various forms of football media provide a wealth of information that can assist coaches at all levels. The following articles and reviews are presented to offer insights into coaching. BY **KEN DAVIS**

Life balance or total commitment to the cause

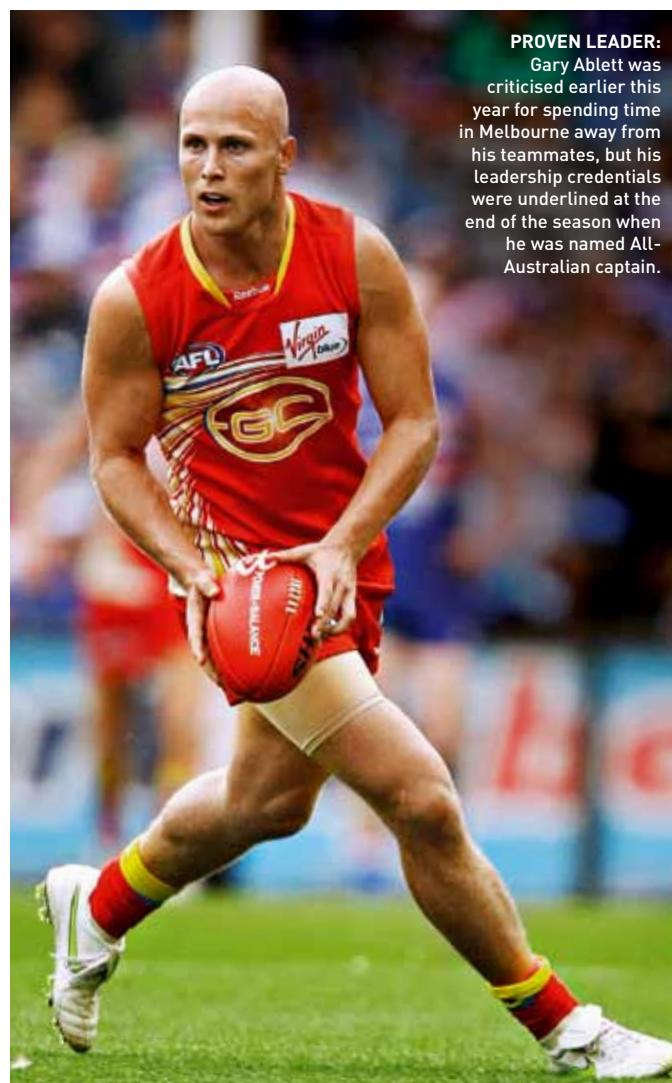
During the year Gary Ablett was scrutinised closely by the media. On Fox Sports' *On the Couch*, Paul Roos broached the subject of Ablett remaining in Melbourne for three days after a game earlier this year. Subsequently Ablett was unfit for selection citing 'general soreness' for missing a game. Roos suggested that no other club would allow an injured player to do that and intimated that the Gold Coast Suns needed to tighten their control of players. On another occasion Ablett has been criticised for going to Sydney when injured, while his team was in Perth playing a NAB Cup game.

Ablett in an interview on *One HD* responded by saying that the Suns had allowed many players to stay on in their home towns so that they could spend some quality time with their friends and families. He spoke of the need for all players to spend time away from football so that they could freshen up and not be totally engulfed with the game.

In an interesting sideline to this issue, former Geelong captain Tom Harley on SEN radio, when quizzed about Ablett, said that he prepared himself extremely well and was meticulous in his commitment to recovery after a game.

Implications for coaching: On the above information I think Paul Roos has got it wrong here. Perhaps armed with more knowledge of the case he may have altered his approach to this issue. I can understand his point that players must do everything possible to enhance their recovery from injury. But given Harley's comment on Ablett's professional approach to recovery, shouldn't a coach provide the resources and trust him to do that in his home state? Shouldn't you consider the benefits of balance in one's lifestyle in keeping an athlete mentally fresh for the game? Players are not robots.

Having read a biography of Paul Roos I know he embraced balance in his own life and always found time to spend with his family and close friends. He travelled extensively in the off-season to get away from football and thus freshen up for the game. So I know he is concerned about players not thinking football '24/7'. The issue with him is not about the lifestyle balance that Ablett advocated, but more with the fact that Ablett may have not have given himself the best chance to get his body right for the next game. As I have intimated above, I think players with the runs on the board as a professional athlete should be afforded the benefit of having some time out with friends and family when they play a game in their home town. A player who has a history of failing to adhere to recovery protocol might not be given such allowances. In Ablett's case, I think he should have been cut some slack here.



PROVEN LEADER:

Gary Ablett was criticised earlier this year for spending time in Melbourne away from his teammates, but his leadership credentials were underlined at the end of the season when he was named All-Australian captain.

With regards to the other issue of him going to watch a wrestling match in Sydney while his team was playing a NAB Cup game in Perth, I once again have empathy for Ablett. As he stated in his interview, it was decided that he wouldn't make the trip to Perth. Clearly, there could have been some benefits in terms of his leadership if he did go to Perth. Young players might have profited from his wisdom gained from his vast experience. However, once it was decided by the club that he would not go why would one question his decision to go to a wrestling match? Whilst wrestling may not be everyone's cup of tea, surely it would allow him to get away from football for awhile. Would critics prefer to have him sit on the couch, drink beer and bet on the horses all day? I think not! Give the players some freedom to explore their own activities away from football until they mess up. I think the Suns' management has got it right here. They seem aware that they've assembled a group from all over Australia who have moved to the Gold Coast all at once to form a new team. They need to promote professionalism but still manage young players and provide opportunities for keeping in touch with families when they return to play in their home state.

Innovation sometimes just happens

A brief but nonetheless significant reflection from an interview conducted by Mark Fine and Geoff Poulter with Robert Walls on SEN radio. Walls was asked about the evolution of the »

'huddle' that he famously and successfully introduced at Fitzroy to win first possession from a kick-in. He said one of his assistants who had experience in other sports floated the concept with him and they literally etched out the strategy at the dinner table. Salt shakers, knives, forks and sauce bottles all became 'players' as they sorted out how the huddle might thwart opposition sides. Walls added it took a lot of the off-season for the players to perfect the strategy.

Implications for coaching: Often people believe that they are not creative and that such a skill is somehow inherent to some and not others. Of course, some find it easier to be innovative but if you work at it, ponder, and seek solutions to problems, you can often just happen to create something new. I believe everyone can create innovative strategies, drills and even techniques. Creativity need not necessarily be the domain of elite coaches. It's possible that a coach at Busselton or Wodonga may discover the next major innovation in our game.

The other point emanating from this interview is that it often helps to engage experts from other sports in order to facilitate change in our game. When I spent three years in the United States I watched a lot of American football games and used to ask questions of coaches about strategies they used. For example, it didn't make sense to me to have an all-round athlete like Deion Sanders playing only when the opposition had the ball. Can you imagine only playing Chris Judd when his team had the ball? What a waste of his great intercepting skills. I also pondered what would happen if the kickers sometimes moved to kick with their non-preferred side. Would it not cause some confusion for the opposition kick blockers? Now I have to say the reaction to these suggestions did nothing to enhance my reputation as a sports analyst in the US. Comments like "he should be deported back to that primitive land" were muttered as I skulked back to my seat in the back of the room. I have however noticed some 20 years on that coaches have begun to utilise their top athletes in both defensive and offensive roles. I was before my time again!

The point is that people outside the sport can bring a fresh view of the game and not be hamstrung by concepts accepted for ages. Coaches should encourage people from outside football to observe and see if they can come up with some innovative strategies just like Robert Walls did at that dinner many years ago.

Dedicating time and resources to creative and innovative thinking is important.

The wise man prepares for life after playing football

In an interesting article in the *Herald Sun* by Jay Clark, Hawthorn defender Stephen Gilham outlines how he is continually developing his knowledge and experience in the game so that he can stay in footy after his playing career. Currently he is doing match-day analysis for community radio station 3WBC 94.1FM. He says, "If I can build my standing in the game and maybe show some talent ... maybe down the track a door may open up."

Unlike many of his teammates he enjoys analysing the game, studying methods and game plans. In addition to passionately and diligently watching all the games he can on TV, he is studying his Level 2 coaching and is doing a personal training course. Both could assist in a coaching career if that opportunity arose in the future.



WELL ROUNDED: Hawthorn full-back Stephen Gilham is preparing for life after football by doing football commentary for a community radio station.

Implications for coaching: Although the above approach may be more relevant for AFL players, the principle remains the same for players at community level. If you want to stay involved in our great game after finishing playing, then it is sensible to start preparing to coach or work in the media during your playing career. Go and do a coaching course, watch elite coaches in action, and do some media training to enhance your knowledge of sports journalism.

With Brendan McCartney's appointment as Western Bulldogs coach after stints at Richmond, Geelong and Essendon, it is apparent that playing AFL is not absolutely necessary for one to embark on an elite coaching career. Brendan played local footy in Geelong, studied sport science and education at Deakin University and began his pathway in coaching by leading Ocean Grove to many premierships. His attitude to learning, sprinkled with self-confidence and man management skills have enabled him to succeed at the highest level. So the lesson for all budding coaches is to become a lifetime learner and collector of material that will ensure you have the necessary knowledge to form the basis for your coaching if the coaching cards fall your way sometime in the future. **CE**


From the ivory tower & beyond

In this regular section, **KEN DAVIS** looks at relevant articles, research and pearls of wisdom in sports science and coaching. In this edition, he explores how a coach strikes the right balance between hands-on teaching and allowing their players to learn for themselves.



LESSON LEARNED: New Collingwood coach Nathan Buckley dedicated himself to becoming a more physical player after spending most of his first season in the SANFL Under-19s on the interchange bench.

Do we need a coach?

 A few years back I read with interest an article by Paul Wilkins, an elite archery coach and trained psychologist, who challenged the very essence of coaching. In fact, he suggested that coaching may be the biggest handicap to learning. Now that sort of talk is like a red rag to a bull for coaching scientists, but on reflection many points he makes are worthy ones. It challenged me to find the right balance of the see-saw between coach-directed and self-directed learning of skills in sport.

Wilkins' arguments are extreme but essentially are summarised in the following quotes. I'll present these first and then outline my reactions.

- 1 *There is an assumption current in our society that for someone to learn there has to be a teacher.*
- 2 *Over the course of millions of years, the brain has evolved the ability to explore its environment and learn from its exploration.*
- 3 *Unfortunately, a whole industry has grown up which seems dedicated to the proposition that learning in humans can only take place under carefully structured conditions and when controlled by those who know how to make it happen.*
- 4 *This reliance on teaching seems to me to ignore one fundamental feature of sports . . . most have built in a simple unequivocal indicator of how well an action has been performed: the result.*
- 5 *Wilkins presents an argument that there are many different ways of performing a skill successfully and that "locking in" on one particular way may be self-defeating. The orthodox way does not work for everyone and attempts to impose it simply don't work. . . some break every rule in the book but they achieve results.*
- 6 *The key idea here is operant conditioning. A sequence of actions which is followed by a successful outcome is reinforced. Conversely, a sequence which results in an unsuccessful outcome is punished and becomes less likely. Quite rapidly the pattern of behaviour shapes to that which is most effective for the individual.*
- 7 *In short if you want people to learn how to play football, give them a ball, a stretch of grass and let them get on with it. The best don't need teaching – they will learn anyway . . . the mediocre will never learn: suggest they take up archery instead.*

Editor's response: There are some valid points in Wilkins' arguments. We can over-coach and provide too much information for a learner to handle. There is little doubt that people will learn through trial and error. However, skilled coaches, with a more balanced approach, can provide feedback and direction to accelerate the learning process by working on one aspect of performance at a time. The coach needs to be constantly alert to the impact of instructions on the learner, searching for the best way of communicating what is required and what focus will assist in acquiring the skill.

Coaches do need to encourage learners to look at the outcome and try to determine ways to correct technique. It does help to develop athletes who can self-coach but this takes time and can be aided by a coach who guides the athlete to reach that objective. Educating the athlete to link outcomes to technique is a task that gradually develops athletes who are not reliant on coaches to correct their mistakes. However, although professional golfers are very good at self-analysis almost all benefit from having a regular 'check up' from their 'technique doctor', the coach. From time to time. So a part of a coach's task is to teach an athlete to self-analyse and correct any flaws. Some may do it naturally as Wilkins suggests, but many will flounder without assistance and continue to repeat technique flaws.

The issue of coaches 'locking in' on a particular way of performing a skill is a very pertinent warning to coaches. With most skills there are a range of ways of achieving an acceptable outcome – a range of 'correctness' if you like, and coaches need to be flexible enough to accommodate such variation. In cricket, the bowling styles of Jeff Thomson and Max Walker would most probably have been changed by the 'narrow-minded' technical coach. The 'Fosbury flop' may not have revolutionised high jumping if Dick Fosbury's coach had exercised a 'directed' approach. However, the extreme of letting all players find their own technique is not the answer either. There are core essentials in all techniques that satisfy biomechanical principles, and these must be adhered to if optimum performance is to be attained. »

The last point [7] made above was I'm sure made with 'tongue in cheek'. It is ridiculous in the extreme to suggest that kids would learn best if left to their own devices. Sure we need to encourage self-discovery but without any models it would be a long journey to excellence. Coaches must be able to accelerate the process by careful blending of direction and opportunity for self-experiment. Which end of the see-saw is closer to the ground will depend very much on the learner. The key is to strike the right balance for each individual. The contention that the best don't need coaching is nonsense. They may pick up things quicker, but some guidance is needed while still providing opportunity for flair and experimentation.

A skilful coach learns to utilise the various senses such as the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic to maximise the opportunity for learning. Some learn more effectively from gaining a feel of the movement while others learn from imitation, while others may appreciate guided verbal cues more than their counterparts. **Regardless, it would appear unwise not to utilise all the senses in developing young athletes, rather than relying totally on the visual as Wilkins suggests.**

Balance is the key

WE CAN LEARN A LOT FROM FOOTBALL COACHES AS WELL AS COACHES FROM OTHER SPORTS

In the last edition of *Coaching Edge* I provided examples of work done by students of mine at ACU in sourcing out information from coaching biographies. In this edition I wish to acknowledge the contribution of, Daniel Forbes, Duncan Ragheb and Phillip Ward, who examined the biographies of Nathan Buckley, Sir Alex Ferguson and John Buchanan. A summary of their findings is presented below.



NATHAN BUCKLEY –
COLLINGWOOD ASSISTANT COACH, SENIOR COACH FROM 2012

→ Early lessons

At about 18 Nathan was working hard in a factory all day and would go from there to football training. He said, "Diet wasn't even a factor then – every lunchtime I'd gorge myself on anything and everything. On the way home from training I'd buy three junior burgers, a large fries, a large coke and a chocolate sundae at McDonald's and wolf it down in the car park before driving home to devour the meal waiting for me."

Editor's note: It is obvious that the earlier we can get young athletes to understand the importance of good nutrition, the better. Many still believe that because they are exercising so much and not putting on weight they can eat what they want. A coach needs to stress that nutritious foods can enhance athletic performance and, conversely, foods lacking that quality can inhibit one's growth as an athlete.

→ Champions have experienced rejection.

Buckley said: "When I arrived at Port Adelaide, I quickly discovered I was a long way short of the standard required to become a regular player at SANFL Under 19s level. I spent most of my first season on the interchange bench. My coach valued toughness and physicality – elements of my game lacking at the time."

Editor's note: It is hard to imagine Nathan Buckley as a bench player at any level of football given his exceptional record as an elite midfielder in a powerful AFL team. Clearly, he took on board this assessment, developed a strong body and was more than adept at facing the physical challenges involved in the game at the highest level. It should be heartening to all budding footballers that you don't

have to be the best player in a junior team to make it at an elite level. Also it is important for young players to accept and address issues raised by coaches, as Buckley apparently did in this case.

→ You can kick too hard

With such a talented kicker as Buckley it is hard to comprehend that his style would be criticised by coaches. But apparently both Robert Walls and Tony Shaw warned Buckley that kicking hard to a teammate was not sensible if the player had trouble controlling the ball. Walls said, "If you're kicking the ball 30 or 40 metres, you don't have to kick it so hard that it'd take the receiver's head off."

Editor's note: In years gone by the conventional wisdom was to get the ball to a teammate as quickly as possible to limit the chances of interception from an opponent. However, this concept of 'pacing' or 'weighting' one's kicks to make it easy for teammates to mark the ball is paramount in today's style of possession football.



JOHN BUCHANAN –
FORMER COACH OF SUCCESSFUL AUSTRALIAN CRICKET TEAM

→ Create an environment where the coach becomes increasingly redundant

Buchanan states that as an athlete matures, a coach needs to keep pulling back, no longer being the director but more of a safety net, allowing the individual athlete to grow.

Editor's note: Such a strategy is difficult for coaches to achieve since it involves sacrificing one's ego. Coaches need to be there for all athletes and sometimes even the most experienced players need your attention. However, as a general rule, it makes sense to endeavour to teach players to coach themselves and, thus, make yourself increasingly redundant as a coach.



ALEX FERGUSON –
LONGSTANDING COACH OF MANCHESTER UNITED SOCCER TEAM

→ Repetition versus variability

Ferguson believes that it is wrong to give players variety just to keep them happy. The importance placed on repetition is that by repeating drills, difficult skills become habitual. Ferguson supports his case by citing his experience with David Beckham, who many at the time thought was the best striker in England. He believed Beckham achieved his status by practice and repetition, rather than talent or genetics.

Editor's note: There can be little doubt that repetition is important in developing a high level of skill in any domain. However, as outlined in 'Coaching is a balancing act' on page 26 of this edition of *Coaching Edge*, a coach needs to be aware of the mental state of their athletes. Providing a variety of drills/activities may not be necessary for some players but others may need it to prevent potential for burnout. We are dealing with humans here not robots, and fresh drills can help to keep some athletes energised and motivated.

→ Performing without key players

According to Ferguson, a good team should have structures and team rules that withstand the loss of key players.

Editor's note: The loss of key players naturally may weaken a side's capacity to perform. However, with good team structures and rules

in place, as well as a strong youth development program, such losses can be minimised. Certainly adopting a positive approach to such changes is important and you often hear of coaches saying how losses of personnel create opportunities for others. It is imperative that the replacements are not only ready physically but also mentally to handle the elevation to the top team. So, structures and team rules are of no use if the incoming athlete is not emotionally and physically ready to make the step up.

→ You can't do it all on your own

In his early days of management, Ferguson wanted to oversee every aspect of coaching his teams. Over time he realised this attitude could be exhausting and cost him an immense amount of time just observing his athletes. So he established a fine team of assistants to fill roles from work on the training track and data collection in games, to sport psychologists dealing with individual issues with players.

Editor's note: Delegating responsibilities is important in every leadership role. Of course, this depends on having either volunteers or the finances to employ professionals to assist. Time spent 'up-skilling' these individuals to acceptable standards is often viewed as wasteful but long-term benefits may outweigh short-term hindrances. In such instances of delegation, trust must ultimately be given to those who are given a task. It is clear at the AFL level that assistants such as line coaches are given complete responsibility for their task, with the head coach using their input to make decisions.

Strengths coaching: Teaching mental toughness

Recently, I attended a conference at the Centre of Excellence for Cricket in Brisbane and was impressed with an approach adopted by Dr Sandy Gordon in his work with the Western Warriors cricket team. Termed 'strengths coaching' it has grown from an emerging field of positive psychology, and focuses essentially on working on building on the strengths of individuals rather than the traditional way of tackling weaknesses.

It was interesting to see that Greater Western Sydney Giants innovation and development manager Alan McConnell presented a paper on positive psychology at the AFL National Coaching Conference in January 2011.

In his presentation, Gordon quoted Linley, Woolston and Biswas-Diener (2009), as defining strengths coaching as follows:

It is an approach to coaching whereby strengths are used more effectively in the attainment of goals, and a value-adding outcome of coaching, whereby the coaching is used to enable the realisation and development of an individual's strengths.

Key questions/tasks coaches may ask athletes when shaping a role for each player may include the following:

- My strengths are ... I feel strong when I am ...
- What are my best skills?
- How do I gain most of my possessions?
- What defensive skills are my strengths?
- I deliver my best and feel in my element when doing these activities ...
- My favourite role that I find most stimulating is ...
- Things I can do to build on my strengths, put myself into situations where I am in my element are ...

A person lacking self confidence, for instance, may be asked "When recently have you displayed self-belief?" rather than "In what circumstances do you lack self-belief?" Identifying attitudes and emotions that lead to this self-belief and the resultant behaviours that observers witnessed, is the first step in cultivating a more positive self-belief system.

In a football team setting, groups can be formed on the basis of positions usually played, for example, backs, midfielders and forwards. These groups then would meet regularly to consider the following questions:

- Who is the champion in the group in a range of mental toughness factors?
- How can your group capitalise on the strengths of each group member?

Create a schedule of meetings/activities where each individual prepares and presents ideas around building and utilising their strengths.

Editor's note: This approach certainly has merit for all those who are working to improve performance in any domain. I particularly like the idea of identifying times when players have shown a particular aspect of mental toughness that has been a problem for them in other situations. Building on occasions when they have shown this trait is much more appealing to players than focusing on times when they haven't displayed it. Traditionally, as coaches, we tend to look at weaknesses first as a way of improving an athlete.

I am not completely sold on using this approach but it certainly warrants examination and I will follow its development in sporting teams with interest. I applaud the idea of building on strengths, but still think that weaknesses need to be addressed as well.

Umpires look to research to improve decision-making skills.

The average football fan believes that umpiring, like goalkicking, has shown little improvement since the game's inception. Every week so called experts criticise umpires for making seemingly elementary decision-making errors. It is always interesting that depending on which team one supports, opinions can vary on the interpretation of particular situations that occur during a game. Even impartial commentators can disagree on decisions from time to time.

The facts are that the game is played at such intensity nowadays, with so much contested footy, that the task of umpiring has become more complex than at any other stage of the game's development. One-on-one battles have become a rarity with zoning and presses creating masses of players around the ball.

Having witnessed the work of the AFL Umpiring Department, headed by Jeff Gieschen and Rowan Sawers, I am amazed at the level of planning and reflection that goes on every week. Decisions from previous weeks are scrutinised closely with input encouraged from all umpires in the quest for the impossible, but always desirable, perfect umpiring performance.

In this search for excellence in umpiring, some recent research has been undertaken to improve decision-making accuracy. In a landmark study by Berry and Larkin, funded jointly by the AFL Research Board and AFL Game Development, the researchers systematically administered a 12-week video-based training during the 2010 season to 52 umpires.

The results showed the training intervention group who received video-based training significantly improved their decision-making performance when compared to a control group. This improvement shown by the training intervention group was shown to be about eight per cent from the baseline measure. When applied to in-game umpire performance, the authors believe this increase in decision-making skill may have a profound effect if video-based training is undertaken for an extended period—years rather than weeks.

With continued research and with the people at the coal-face of umpiring continuing to work assiduously to improve performance, perhaps the dream of a day when the umpires are applauded off the field by the supporters of both teams is not too far away. **CE**



DUAL FOCUS:
Essendon assistant coach Simon Goodwin (right, with development coach Shannon Grant) says half-backs have to combine defence with attack.

Attacking from half-back

To play as a half-back flanker in today's game, you cannot afford to focus solely on defence. Although a player's initial focus in a match should be to shut their man down, they should then look to hurt the opposition by counter-attacking.
BY **SIMON GOODWIN**

DESCRIPTION OF THE POSITION

▶ To play on the half-back flank, it is essential to play not just with a shutdown mentality, but with a mindset to be an attacking offensive weapon who can hurt opposition teams. The player must first of all limit their opponent's influence on the game. To do this they must use defensive skills of positioning, reading the game and understanding what their opponent is trying to do, and have an appetite for pressure skills (tackling, frontal pressure, contested ball, half wins—creating stoppages). Their ability to drop off their opponent and chop out leading lanes will also be vital. However doing this is not enough in the modern game. They must be able to link up offensively, distributing the ball to midfielders and forwards with precision by hand and foot.

PLAYERS THAT PLAY THIS POSITION MUST

- Be good readers of the play.
- Be great kicks.
- Have plenty of courage.
- Have exceptional game knowledge (involved in most structures).
- Have high-level communication.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL OPPOSING PLAYERS

Seem to be ones that possess speed, are good readers of the play, are always on the move—which keeps you as a defender engaged so you are unable to sit off and read the play. They also take their opportunities in front of goal, which makes you more accountable.

COACHING THE POSITION

Key points to get across to players. They must:

- Be good defensively and offensively.
- Have a high level of game knowledge (the footy chip).
- Be highly skilled by hand and foot.
- Be able to play on talls and smalls.
- Be a great communicator.
- Be prepared to leave their man and help when required.

SPECIFIC TRAINING FOR THE POSITION

Must be super fit so they can work both ways with a high intensity

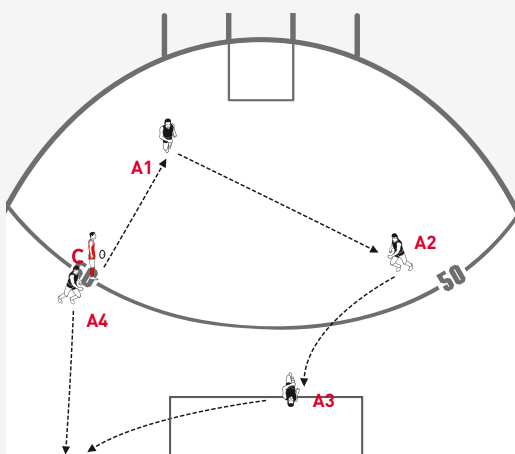
- **Defensive skills** – aerial, tackling, half wins, one on one, prediction.
- **Offensive skills** – range of different kicks/handballs, put in decision-making scenarios.
- Positional walk-throughs with coach.
- Game knowledge testing and execution.

SPECIFIC PRE-MATCH PREPARATION

- Video analysis of potential opponents and discussed with area coach.
- Information of opposition style of play, which may help with their positioning.
- Information on opposition forward 50 stoppages, where they are trying to play the ball.
- Information on where opposition half-forwards are likely to set up in general play stoppages.
- Positive affirmations to enhance their belief in the task at hand.

POSITIONAL COACHING

REQUIREMENTS: 3 kickers, 1 football, coach



A Starting position of players
C Coach

SPEED KICKING

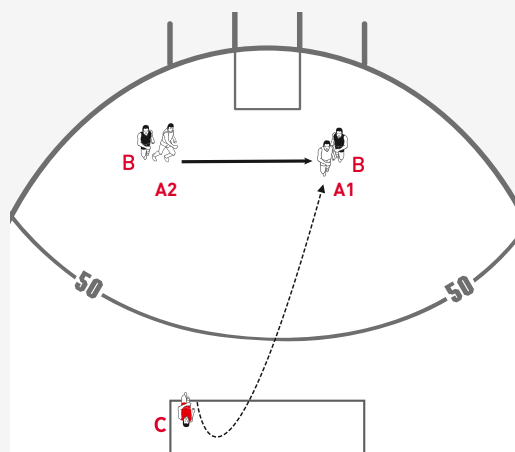
THE PURPOSE OF THE DRILL IS TO PRACTISE SWITCHING THE PLAY AND MOVING THE BALL QUICKLY BY KICKING

- 1 The coach (C) rolls the ball to player A1, who gathers it and switches play to A2 with a quick kick.
- 2 A2 kicks inside to A3.
- 3 A3 rolls to the open side and kicks to advantage to A4.

THE DRILL CAN BE EXTENDED BY:

- A4 continues play to kick to a target inside 50m. Target player takes a shot at goal (set shot if mark is taken).

REQUIREMENTS: Coach, attacking players and defenders



A Represents the starting position of attacking players
B Represents the starting position of defenders
C Coach

THIRD MAN IN SUPPORT

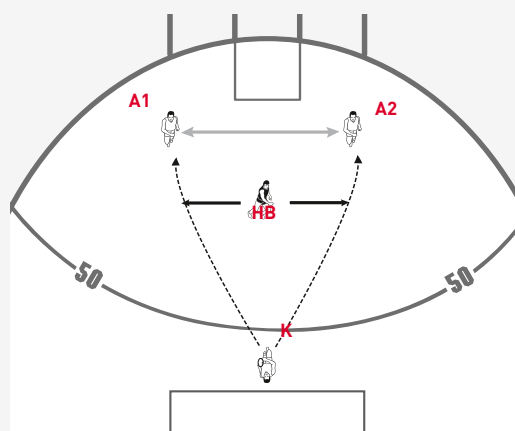
THE PURPOSE OF THE DRILL IS TO ALLOW A SUPPORTING DEFENDER TO PRACTISE SPOILING AS THE THIRD MAN IN SUPPORT

- 1 The coach (C) kicks the ball high to a contest between player A1 and opponent.
- 2 Player A2 leaves opponent to run to the contest and make a spoil.

THE DRILL CAN BE EXTENDED BY:

- The second forward participates in the play.
- Extra players from both sides participate (e.g. running to the contest for the crumbs: front and square) and play continues until a score is made by the forwards or the ball is cleared by the defenders.

REQUIREMENTS: Kicker, attacking players and half-back



A Represents the starting position of attacking players
K Kicker
HB Half-back

INTERCEPT DRILL - READING THE CUES

THE PURPOSE OF THE DRILL IS TO PRACTISE READING THE CUES OF THE KICKER AND INTERCEPTING THE PASS.

- 1 A kicker has two forward targets about 15m apart (A1 and A2).
- 2 The half-back is zoning/working the area in front of the target players.
- 3 As the kicker approaches the kick, the half-back works at reading the cues indicating which target the kicker is likely to go to and attempts to intercept the pass.

THE FOCUS OF THE ACTIVITY IS READING THE CUES OF THE KICKER:

- Where the kicker's shoulders are pointed.
- When the eyes drop prior to the kick.
- Other cues players or coaches can observe.

THE DRILL CAN BE EXTENDED BY:

- Adding extra defenders to oppose the target players.

Simon Goodwin is an Essendon assistant coach and former Adelaide captain.

This article was written as part of the requirements for the AFL/AFLPA level 2 coaching course. CE

WELL RESOURCED: West Coast high performance manager Glenn Stewart (pictured with former Eagle Rowan Jones) heads a team of 20 dedicated to maximising the Eagles players' ability to run out games.


Science in football

Then and now



Sports science was still a relatively untapped area in the 1970s. But since then football clubs have embraced ever-improving technology and committed themselves to a seemingly endless quest for a high-performance edge.

BY FRANK PYKE

 Back in the 1970s, Ross Smith and I co-authored a book entitled *Football: The Scientific Way*.

It encouraged coaches to be systematic in their approach to player development and underlined the role that sport science can play in doing this. More specifically, it covered the physiology of training and fitness, the biomechanical analysis and acquisition of skills, the psychology of performance, game analysis and the organisation of team practice. In the process, it introduced coaches to what were, at that time, some new concepts, technologies and methods.

Since then, the use of science in Australian sport, including football, has increased exponentially. What was used in the '70s has now been replaced by far better technology and a more advanced understanding of what constitutes high performance. These developments have coincided with Australia's well established international reputation in sport science, which has contributed significantly to the nation's emergence as a world power in sport during the past two decades.

Some of the testing equipment and technologies used in earlier times to evaluate the fitness, skill and workload of football players, included treadmills, ergometers and dynamometers, high-speed cameras and video systems and heart-rate telemetry. However, collecting and interpreting the data was a slow process and a far cry from what is possible in today's high-tech computerised world.

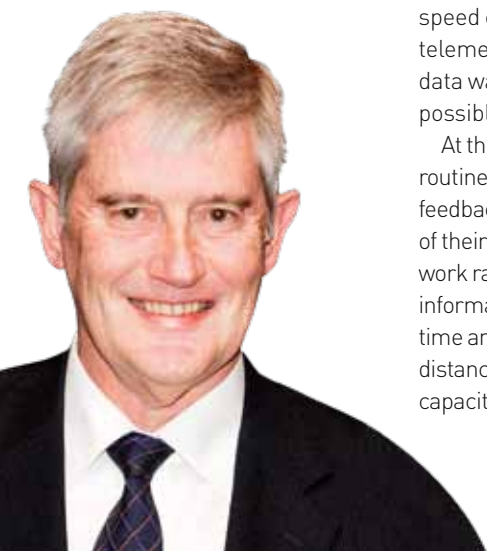
At the highest level of the game today, it is now routine procedure for coaches to receive instant feedback on the effectiveness of specific aspects of their game plan and the affect it is having on the work rate and heart rate of individual players. The information available in the coach's box through real time analyses can, at times, be overwhelming. The distances covered by players per minute and their capacity to execute team strategies at stoppages and

in various patterns of play put them constantly under the microscope. There is no escape from the close scrutiny of modern GPS tracking systems!

Providing this information and then implementing appropriate development programs takes extra resources. The growth of the game commercially has permitted the number of support staff in AFL clubs to be increased. The high performance manager at the West Coast Eagles, Glenn Stewart, now coordinates six full-time staff who form part of a total complement of 20 personnel directly responsible for preparing the team. Compare this to the two or three part-timers of pre-AFL days. As Stewart says, "Having more staff on board has enabled us to implement an individualised approach to player preparation. This is vital if we are going to identify and remedy each player's limitations and enable them to make the best possible contribution to team performance."

In addition to having more people involved and access to new technologies, the process of improving individual player development has involved adapting to the changing demands of the modern game. For example, field fitness testing has undergone changes which reflect the increased demand for speed and power in the game. While endurance is still important, the 15-minute run has been replaced by the 'beep test' or shuttle run and/or the two or three-kilometre time trial. Interval sprint tests are also now in vogue and the total time recorded by a player to complete a series of 10 sprints over a distance of 20 metres, every 20 seconds, is a popular format. The sprint test, formerly over 40 yards, is now conducted over five, 10 and 20-metre distances, and agility runs are conducted in standard conditions indoors using electronic timing gates.

The three repetitions maximum (3RM) weight that can be lifted in the bench press, leg press and squat is now a common and practical measure of upper



and lower-body strength. This can be complemented by using force plates during these movements to measure the rate of force development or power generated. In evaluating leg power this procedure is preferred to the vertical jump test, which requires an element of skill and timing.

Rather than rely on the sit and reach test as an overall indicator of body flexibility, the team physiotherapists now employ specific joint flexibility tests as part of a screening process in a comprehensive injury prevention program.

Another area of player development that has blossomed in recent years is related to what is termed game sense or being able to read the game and be in the right place at the right time. Again, modern video and computer technology is required to provide players with anticipation training in order to facilitate their decision-making skills. The coach needs to work closely with the sport scientist to identify match situations where having these skills is essential.

Other areas of sport science have also been utilised regularly to enhance the physical and mental skills of individual players and teams. For example, biomechanical experts have corrected faults in kicking and sport psychologists have provided advice for enhancing mental toughness.

The importance of adopting an individualised approach to player preparation is also seen in the way that different players cope with hot conditions. The volume and content of replacement fluid needs to be player-specific according to their sweating response and how palatable they find particular drinks. The same applies to fulfilling their dietary requirements. It is an individual matter, depending on the need for the player to gain or lose weight and their match-day responsibilities. Meeting dietary needs becomes an even greater issue for the team nutritionist when players travel interstate to play.

The medical staff utilise modern information systems software to monitor the incidence of injury. At-risk players are identified and their training loads closely supervised. Maturation and body composition measures are used in young players to moderate training loads on developing bodies. The word recovery has become an important one in training prescription and massage, ice baths, spas, and compression garments are now common place around professional clubs. Salivary tests are also used to evaluate hormone levels, particularly the cortisol/testosterone ratio, which increases when a player is over-stressed. This can also be reflected in the general mood state of the player, which needs to be closely monitored by the coaching and support staff. Return from injury protocols have become more sophisticated to improve successful returns and reduce recurrences.

Brian Dawson, professor in sport physiology at the University of Western Australia and 2010 premierships coach of Swan Districts in the WAFL,



is concerned about the impact of the modern game on the injuries being sustained by players. He applauds what was done a few years ago to reduce the incidence of posterior cruciate ligament injuries in ruckmen who were clashing knees at centre bounces. The rules were changed and these players now have to remain inside a circle which limits their approach to five steps. This encourages them to jump upwards rather than into each other. He believes that we now need to look at ways to reduce injuries that have resulted from an increase in the speed and ferocity of the game. These include torn hamstring tendons and anterior cruciate ligaments and de-stabilisation of the shoulder.

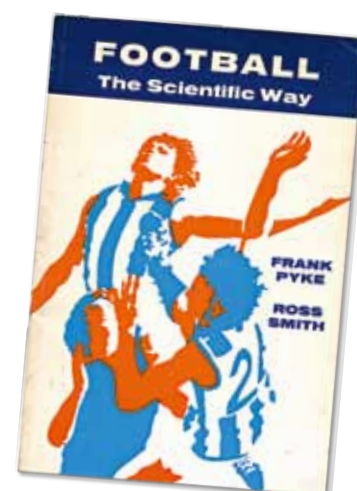
Dawson also has a firm view on the number of players presently being rotated from the interchange bench. "The game should be more about survival of the fittest, as it used to be, rather than survival of the freshest. More frequent rotations from the interchange bench have ramped up the speed of the game," Dawson says. "Limiting the number of rotations will make the game more enjoyable, both for players and spectators. Players want to play the game, not be seven-minute burst specialists."

The AFL Research Board, which has been in operation since 2000, has carried out numerous research projects in relation to monitoring the game; including its laws, injury prevention and management, skill acquisition, youth development, umpiring, coaching and various social issues. This has included a specific focus on game research (monitoring how the game is played and identifying trends) to assist the Laws of the Game Committee in its annual review of the rules.

It could be said that one of the outcomes of adopting a modern scientific approach is that players are now bigger, stronger and faster and, as a result, the game has become more physical and potentially more injurious. Some might even say that science has pushed the game to its very limits and the brakes now need to be applied. The answer may lie in adopting a more balanced approach to the preparation of players, not only between effort and recovery but between the science and art of coaching. Essentially, it means finding a balance between high-tech and high-touch. **CE**

INJURY CONCERN: Swan Districts 2010 premierships coach and sport physiology professor Brian Dawson (here coaching the WA state representative team) says injuries caused by the increased speed and ferocity of the modern game need to be addressed.

BACK THEN: Football's use of sports science has exploded since Frank Pyke co-wrote *Football: The Scientific Way* in the 1970s.



Frank Pyke was involved in sport science and administration from the early 1970s. This included teaching and research in several Australian universities before he became the inaugural executive director of the Victorian Institute of Sport, a position he held until his retirement in 2006. He played 141 league games for the Perth Football Club and represented Western Australia, and then assisted the club in developing player fitness training programs.

Sadly, Frank passed away after a short illness while this edition was being prepared for publication. He made a significant contribution to football, which will be recognised in our next edition.



A PLAYER'S COACH:
Former Sydney Swans coach Paul Roos has good man-management skills, Mike Sheahan says.

Coaches I've known

In an interview with **KEN DAVIS**, leading Melbourne football journalist **MIKE SHEAHAN** shares his observations and insights into the coaches he has interviewed and observed over his celebrated career in journalism.

Mike recently retired after more than four decades reporting on the game.

Mike Sheahan has established himself as a doyen of commentators on AFL football. His regular features in the *Herald Sun*, his much-anticipated top-50 player lists, and his regular insightful work on radio and TV has earned him many awards throughout his career.

The Media Centre at the AFL has been fittingly named in his honour. His passion for football is undoubted and his longevity in the world of football journalism is a testament to his ability to stay relevant and up to date with trends in the game. In his time, he has seen many coaches up close both at training and in the cauldron of post-match interviews. He frequently has written articles both praising and criticising a coach's performance. In this interview, I wanted to tap into his knowledge of coaches and coaching, as well as exploring how journalists become qualified to comment on the role of coaches. In Mike's case, I think you can readily see his knowledge base has been built through a long association with football and football coaches. He has interviewed so many over his time in the media and talked informally to them as well. The richness of this experience is one that few people in football have achieved, so I hope you enjoy his journey.

The early years of playing football

Mike played football for VFA side Werribee at a time when the VFA was clearly the second best competition in Victoria. He knows what it is like to be making decisions under intense pressure and threat of physical contact.

KD: Could you start off by talking about the coaches you had in both junior footy and at Werribee?

In the late 1950s-early '60s, the coach used to stand up on the bench and would talk about blood and guts and determination. The junior coach we had was one of those guys who was prepared to do all the work like pick people up etcetera, but he didn't care much about the skills.

It was a good tough competition at Werribee. And the first coach I had was Neil Crompton, who famously kicked the winning goal for the Melbourne premiership team of 1964. He was a very good kick. He taught me, as

a coach, the investment in time with people. He'd drive me home from training and just talk. Broader than just football he talked about life skills. I can't remember any major footy lessons he taught me.

Bruce Comben coached us next and he was a good bloke but probably taught us less. He was more about 'kill them and bash them' and all that. When Ian Bryant came from Footscray, he awakened me to the science of football with more strategy and statistics forming part of his approach.

KD: What about training?

I used to hate the one-on-one competitive work. Usually this was done on a bloke that was vying for your position. But in retrospect, I think it is a very good exercise in terms of application and your pride because everyone's watching.

I used to love kick-to-kick before training, which they don't allow them to do now. Learning to use your body in aerial contests has become less



frequent in sessions I have seen. I guess they avoid this for injury reasons.

I say risk reward. It's bad luck if someone gets a cracked finger. You imagine how much quicker Tom Hawkins would've advanced had he had that session once a week with Matthew Scarlett, one-on-one work, when to lead, when to drop back. I have always thought that change in approach was a mistake.

Editor's note: It would be interesting to see how much work is done each week in the AFL with players competing for marks. It is clear in recent times that defenders have improved their ability to spoil, flood back and zone off to increase pressure on the marking forward. But is the demise of the competitive mark at least in part due to lack of practice of this skill?

The skills are fantastic at training, but the execution of skills under the hammer on a match day is something else.

The more we can simulate match conditions at training, and I know they do in a broad sense, the better. I remember watching North in the 1970s when they were doing it.

Remember the days where we could wear whatever we wanted to training? Barassi made them all train in the North jumpers, all did things together. These are only little things in themselves but he almost dragged football into professionalism. David Dench is the best full-back I've ever seen. Barassi turned him into a footballer. Every night before training he'd have Barry Cable drilling the balls to Dench in the rooms, from 20 metres. He had detected that Dench had those hard hands. I thought they were really advanced at North.

KD: How many of the sports journalists go and watch training?

In the early days, we had to interview players after training so we'd watch training. We wouldn't watch intently like we were at a movie, but we watched the good players perform. These days, I don't want to be painted as this bloke that says it was always better in the old days, but they have their media conferences before training now. So you have 20 journalists there before training, then they're gone. I think they miss out on their education when they do that. Sometimes that's because they're closed sessions.

Don't get me started on closed sessions! One thing I've learnt is if you want to find out something about a team, go to the team they're playing that week. They will know everything, who's out, who's got a problem. I'm staggered still about how much intelligence gets out from one club to the other.

When I was working for the *Herald* in the 1980s and Essendon and Hawthorn were the big clubs, we needed to be really mindful of who was playing or injured. Kevin Egan from Essendon used to tell me, every time Essendon played Hawthorn, who was out, who was starting on the bench, and who was going in with an injury. He was always right!

Selecting a coach—coaching attributes

KD: If you were appointing a coach, what qualities would you look for and what questions would you ask?

I would co-opt a coach to put on my panel. I think often there is a bit of romance associated with appointing a new coach who has just completed playing, but I would lean towards someone with some experience in the role. Recently Leigh Matthews has supported this view and asked why we tend to discard someone like Neale Daniher when we talk about upcoming coaching positions. He believes that the experiences gained at Melbourne would place him well ahead of someone who has just finished playing.

Of all the people involved in football at the moment, I would select Paul Roos and then Michael Malthouse. I like Roos' man-management skills. He said he had one lesson that he'd learnt and that was not to review performances immediately after a game, because you are not always on firm ground as to what you've seen. You need to see the tape again. He doesn't terrorise his players, never denigrates. I agree with Allan Jeans who said, "You catch a lot more flies with honey than vinegar".

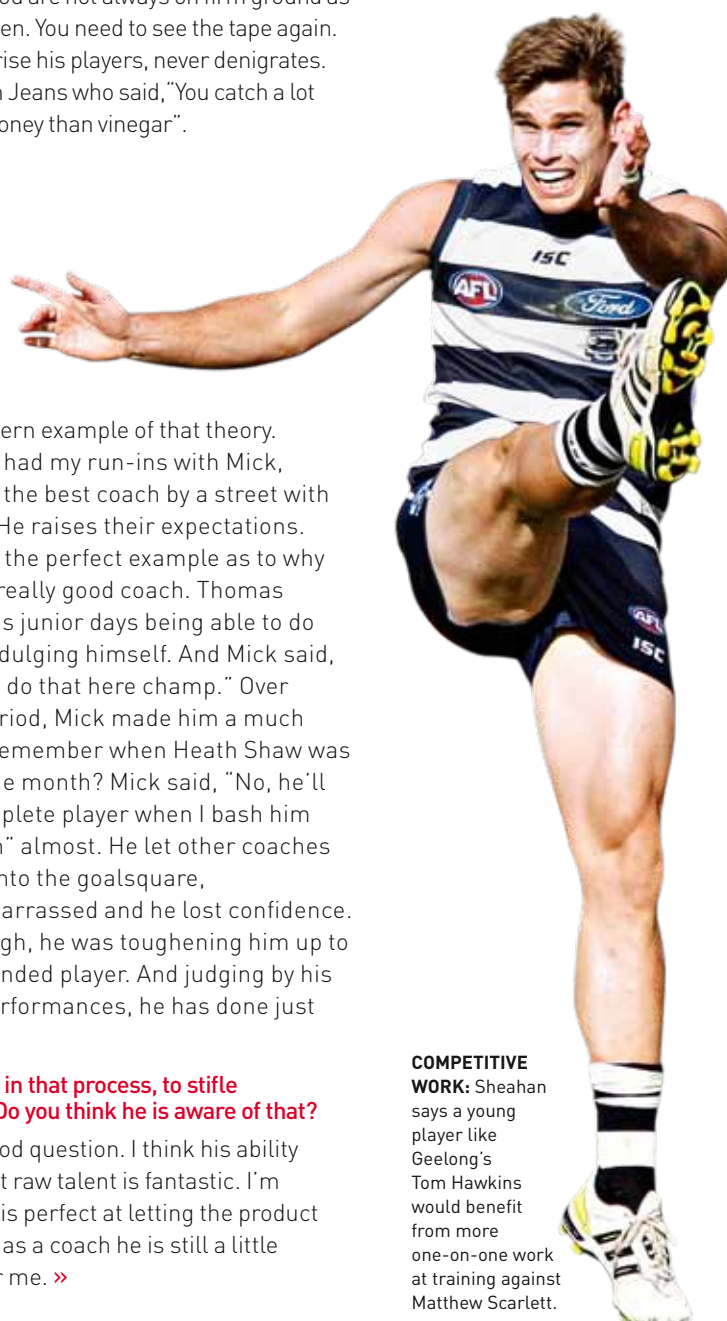
Roos is a modern example of that theory. Malthouse: I've had my run-ins with Mick, but I think he is the best coach by a street with young players. He raises their expectations. Dale Thomas is the perfect example as to why Malthouse is a really good coach. Thomas went through his junior days being able to do anything and indulging himself. And Mick said, "Well, you don't do that here champ." Over a three-year period, Mick made him a much better player. Remember when Heath Shaw was the flavour of the month? Mick said, "No, he'll only be the complete player when I bash him into submission" almost. He let other coaches take him back into the goalsquare, let him get embarrassed and he lost confidence. Ultimately though, he was toughening him up to make him a rounded player. And judging by his recent finals performances, he has done just that.

KD: Is it possible in that process, to stifle a player's flair? Do you think he is aware of that?

Yeah, that's a good question. I think his ability to fast-track that raw talent is fantastic. I'm not sure that he is perfect at letting the product blossom. I think as a coach he is still a little too defensive for me. »

THE MORE WE CAN SIMULATE MATCH CONDITIONS AT TRAINING, THE BETTER. NORTH WERE DOING IT IN THE 1970s?

Mike Sheahan



COMPETITIVE WORK: Sheahan says a young player like Geelong's Tom Hawkins would benefit from more one-on-one work at training against Matthew Scarlett.



THE OLD PRO: Ron Barassi instilled professionalism into all four clubs he coached (Carlton, North Melbourne, Melbourne and the Sydney Swans), Sheahan says.

KD: I suppose he'd argue, look at Thomas now compared to three years ago.

That's true. It's a fine line isn't it? Coaches say, fly, kick torps etcetera, but make sure it works! You can't have it both ways. If you are going to take a risk then you must be prepared to cop some mistakes and not criticise players for taking calculated risks.

I love what Dennis Armfield did in the final last year against the Swans, which resulted in a critical turnover. He took on an opponent and got caught which resulted in a key goal to the Swans. I loved the way Ratten handled that situation. He didn't berate him, Armfield obviously had the confidence from the coach so that the next time he got the footy, he took them on again. I quite like the way Ratten goes about his job and the passion that he shows for his team.

I've watched Mick since he went to the Bulldogs. He turned the Bulldogs from a ramshackle, disorganised place into a more professional unit. They should've played the 1985 Grand Final. He dragged them up, lifted their standards and he has been doing that now for over 20 years.

Importance of coaches

KD: How important is the coach in the outcome of one game, and in terms of the whole development of the program?

Not as important as the best player, any of the best half dozen players, in my view. To their credit, I don't think coaches these days profess to be the main man on match day. I think they think that their work is done before the game largely. Coaches, when they're honest, I don't think they can read the mood on game day.

Collingwood blokes come prepared, don't they? Consistent performances. A great coach makes a great team even better, or a bad team better. Fundamentally, if the two teams are even I think the better coach will win, but if they're not, the better team will win.

KD: Three coaches that impressed you the most?

The one who gets bad press is Norm Smith, who tends to suffer by comparison with his brother Len. Since I read his biography *Red Fox*, my ranking of Norm Smith went up even further. Many of the approaches that are so modern today he was doing back then. For example, he always wanted to have one more player than the opposition at the contest. Melbourne in his day kicked it long and moved it quickly. He minimised the risks. Bang it in. He must've been a genius.

Barassi was so professional. He is remembered for his work at Carlton and North Melbourne but, even at Sydney, he set the groundwork for their success in later years.

Matthews is so pragmatic, a very practical coach. He just locks in to a simple philosophy and drives it home. He has total self belief in what he does. He doesn't play favourites. Give him or Barassi good teams and they'll win the premiership. They are so demanding of the good players.

KD: There is a view that people who had to work hard to be good players are likely to become better coaches. You could compare Royce Hart to Malthouse and Sheedy – the former an out-and-out star player, the latter two fitting into the mould of the hard-working player. Your views?

I agree with that, but why then was Malcolm Blight so good as a coach? His performance at Geelong with that team was almost as good as his performance at Adelaide. To get that team to three Grand Finals was a great achievement. Some of the players he had there were a bit short of the mark.

His main strength, I think, was that with players that could play, he let them play. I think that is a difference between Blight and Malthouse. Mick is probably more defensive in his work with good players. So judging by their relative successes it appears that both approaches may work.

KD: Any other coaches that have taken your eye?

Tony Jewell: he was volcanic in his personality. The overriding message I got from him was not to complicate it. He was a self-effacing guy. He put his best players where they play best. I'm big on that – you know what you're supposed to do. Don't give them too many instructions. Hammer the main message, but don't complicate it. I agree with that. I mean I've never coached so this is just guesswork. But they're footballers. I can understand coaches trying to be cute when they need to be, like Len Smith did at Fitzroy because he didn't have a team that was fundamentally able to beat the good teams, so he had to have a trick. But I reckon when you've got good sides, let them play.

Ross Lyon, I think he is an outstanding bloke. Just his faith in the structure that he set at St Kilda and their application and resolution. They never ever deviated from the game plan. I'm not sure it made it a great game to watch, but it was so predictable. Their execution was good, they waited until the opening was created.

6 MALCOLM BLIGHT'S MAIN STRENGTH WAS WITH PLAYERS THAT COULD PLAY HE LET THEM PLAY

Sheahan

KD: I worked with him at Richmond, he was just starting out, his ability to analyse the game as it was going on was outstanding. He is very smart.

The longer it goes the more I think he made a massive contribution to Sydney. Proven here. St Kilda was clearly not the most talented team in the competition yet he led it into the 2009-10 Grand Finals and arguably could have won both of them.

Qualifications of journalists to judge coaches

KD: How do sports journalists acquire knowledge of playing, training and coaching?

Lots of people say to me, "What would you know Sheahan, how many games did you play?" Well I've got practiced at answering that: "Well, I've probably played as many as you've played", to the bloke who is getting into me. So we're square, we've both got an opinion that we're passionate about. The famous reviewers, be it theatre, or the movies, if they are passionate about the subject and have been doing it for 20, 30, 40 years, you have to learn as you go. It defies logic to say that you don't. Bart Cummings wasn't a Melbourne Cup winning jockey, but I think his passion for horses and his appetite to talk to people when he was growing up has stood him in good stead. I've done that. When people ask me what my greatest asset is, I say my ears because I listen and hear things. I love sitting down with people that are in footy and we have those long sessions talking footy. If you don't learn from that, you're a dumbbo. I like to think I'm like a sponge as far as footy is concerned. I watch a lot of it, read a lot about it and listen to a lot of people about it. And I have an ego big enough to say, 'I do have an opinion about it'.

And I don't go to the coaches' post-match conferences because they don't say anything. I walked away and Pat Smith criticised me, and Caroline Wilson criticised me, and now they don't go anymore. Because we used to get humiliated there, when you'd get an angry coach.

Even when I'm talking to Mick, I say, don't do the press conferences. You coaches should meet as a group and say, "No, we are vulnerable, we are going to say something we regret. We need to do them next morning or whatever". But if you do them, have some grace about them. I don't want to sit there at my age and have a bloke just demean you. Robert Shaw used to do that. I like him, but when he was at Fitzroy and he'd have Gus Mitchell at his shoulder I'd go in there and get whacked by those blokes, because it's their territory. I think if I were my boss, I'd want Sheahan's opinion. I wouldn't want what Malthouse has told the world. I'd want what my chief football writer thought happened on the day, who played well, who didn't. I criticised Chris Judd this year—and previously—about his kicking. I'm not going to get that from a coach, because they all love him. I'm prepared to stand by that.

KD: Now, imagine I'm a 25-year-old coming into sports journalism, do you think I should go to a coaching course?

I like that idea. I'm not going to do it, at my stage, but I think it's a really good point. Obviously you learn from it. Also, when a coach says, "What do you know?" You can say, "Well I know what your assistant coach knows, because we've done the same course". It shows (a) the interest and (b) you're prepared to explore. Good idea. Never thought of it, but a good idea. I went to a new course at Australian Catholic University (ACU) this year. David King and Paul Hudson were there. I really like that. David King has got a lot of me in him, except he has played 250 games and won two flags! He takes people on. We should. I think I've got credentials, but he definitely has. I like people who challenge.

As a journalist, the one thing we have in our favour is that our job is to review. I'm not proactive. I concede that. In that sense it's a much easier role than coaching. Sometimes I think there are fundamentals that the coaches mess up. Rodney Eade at the start of last year, it was clearly going to blow up in his face to have so many old blokes. Again back to Lyon, I thought he was borderline cruel with his treatment of Max Hudghton and Matt Maguire a couple of years back. But Rodney didn't do it. I'm happy with the 150-game big-bodied guys winning you premierships, but not when they are 33 years old. You can't have six of them in your team.

KD: How does a journalist gain credibility?

I don't think we're that different from players. Your credibility is built on your record. If you keep playing well, people notice who you are. When Alf Brown started at *The Herald*, no one knew who he was. He just forged that reputation over a long period. That's what we all have to do. »

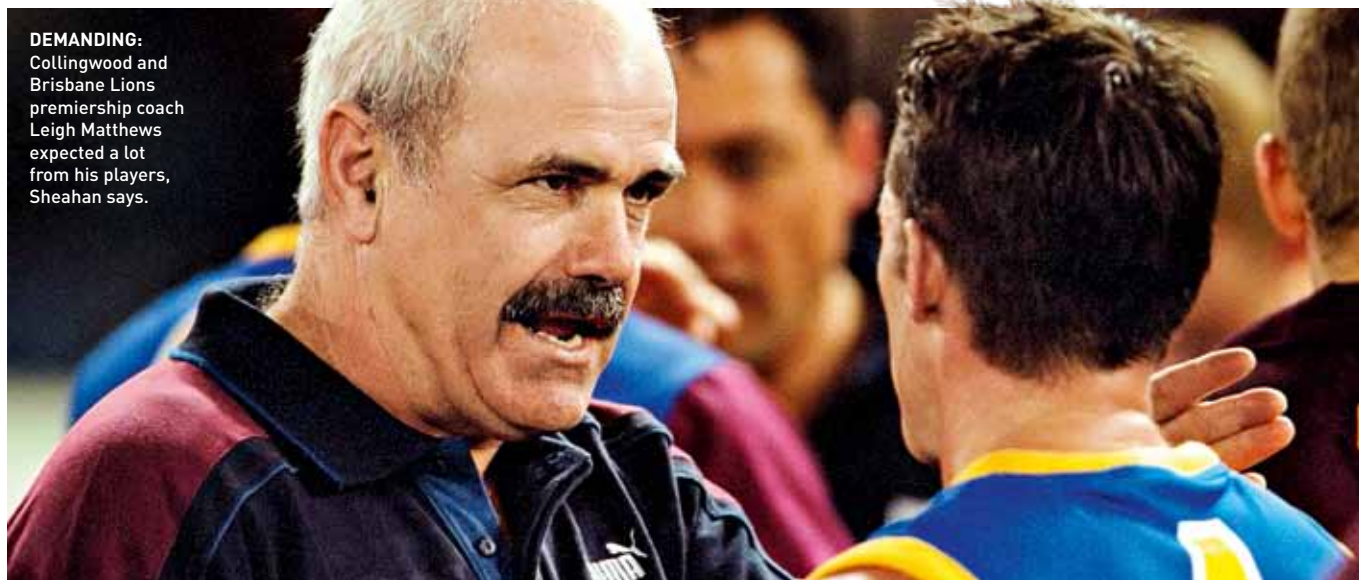
I'M LIKE A SPONGE AS FAR AS FOOTY IS CONCERNED. I WATCH A LOT OF IT, READ A LOT ABOUT IT AND LISTEN TO A LOT OF PEOPLE ABOUT IT?

Sheahan

YOUTH WORKER: According to Sheahan, Mick Malthouse is far and away the best coach of young players.



DEMANDING:
Collingwood and
Brisbane Lions
premiership coach
Leigh Matthews
expected a lot
from his players,
Sheahan says.



‘I DON’T THINK THERE’S ONE PURSUIT ON THE PLANET WHERE A PERSON ISN’T BETTER 10 YEARS ON THAN HE WAS WHEN HE STARTED’

Sheahan

KD: Why are so many coaches tossed aside after only one effort?

Well, that’s the Matthews’ theory and I agree with that. I don’t think there is one pursuit on the planet where a person isn’t better 10 years on than he was when he started. It’s all about chasing a dream isn’t it? The next bloke, he might be the next Mick Malthouse. Now, he may be, but the odds are that he won’t be. That’s why I endorsed Mark Williams at Essendon. I don’t think a bloke becomes a bad coach in an instant. He explores different aspects outside the game.

KD: How would you assess a coach that leads his team to say eighth position?

Interesting you ask that question. I got a hammering recently, when I posed the question: Is it credible to suggest someone that is coaching a team in the bottom four could be a contender for the coach of the year? Given where Richmond has come from, I still think Damien Hardwick’s performance last year was outstanding. If Hardwick had a review clause in his contract, I’d give him 85 per cent. I wouldn’t be doing that for too many coaches. We lose sight of the starting point sometimes. At the start of the season people were saying the AFL should give them draft concessions to make them competitive. They won six games, and probably should’ve won another two. I thought it was a fantastic performance.

KD: Obviously that view isn’t always supported by the members continually hammering the coach, and people who may not be all that well informed pressuring the club into doing something.

No doubt, people power. Worst thing that happened to Matty Knights. I don’t know if he is a good coach or not, but I do know the team he coached last year beat St Kilda twice, beat a full strength Bulldogs and Hawthorn. It’s a very difficult thing to measure. The other thing I do, in my position, I do listen to the people that should know best. My opinion in the finish, but if you keep hearing from the people that should know, they can’t all be wrong.

Players told us messages about David Parkin, Robert Walls. As a block they’re very powerful, but I don’t think they can all ‘swing’. I think there has to be reason for them to turn on a coach. Don’t you?

KD: Oh yes, but I think if the performance is going down, I think it is too easy for them to jump on the coach. Sometime ago I did some research on how AFL teams perform after a change in coach. You’d expect most changes would be made with lowly placed teams so there is more room for improvement. However, by and large there were 50 per cent that went up the ladder with a change of coach but 50 percent that went down. And that was over a long period. So changing a coach does not often fix the problem.

Coaching science

KD: How do you view the use of stats by coaches in recent times?

Coaches always say about us, “Oh! they just read the stats sheets”. But I rarely see a coach prepared to commit after a game about what he has just seen. We should check the stats and then make our own assessment. Terry Wallace as a player used to always get under my guard, and we’d have to do best players immediately after the siren. He used to get the ball 30 or more times each game but I rarely noted that from just watching the game. Really it’s nonsense not to acknowledge a bloke who can get the footy 35 times. However I do say, if I haven’t noticed him, I’m either a bad judge or he doesn’t hurt you with the footy.

I think they’re important, but you can make them tell you what you want to hear. Use them as a guide. When Peter Hudson was at his best, we’d walk out of the football and people would ask, “Who were the best players? How did Hudson go? He wasn’t bad was he, kicked three or four?” He’d actually kicked eight. Every time. Isn’t it relevant? Aren’t you better equipped knowing he’s kicked eight instead of thinking it was three or four. **CE**

LICENCE TO THRILL:
Freakishly talented youngsters like Cyril Rioli should be allowed to play with natural flair.

New kid on the footy block



Every sport has to deal with the issue of bringing youth into the system. If organisations cling to the tried and true for too long then a decline is inevitable. The personnel running effective clubs are aware of the need to consistently freshen up the list, continually exposing the next generation. Sometimes this is done before the individual has earned a spot on form, in the knowledge their education can be fast-tracked by playing alongside more experienced teammates. **BY KEN DAVIS**

There are no guidelines on how best to introduce young players into elite teams. Granted, each player should be treated individually as some can handle pressure more readily than others. For the most part, however, it is rare that a Joel Selwood appears on the sporting horizon and seamlessly fits into the new environment, performing as a veteran from day one. It is more likely that the rookie will experience some 'downs' before they go 'up'.

Imagine the following scenario that occurred about 20 years ago when Essendon met Geelong in a blockbuster game at the MCG. A first-game player for Geelong was given the task of playing at full-back on the legendary Paul Salmon who was at the peak of his form as a power forward. The debutant looked as white as a sheet before he ran out on the field to combat the imposing figure of Salmon in front of a capacity crowd. Coach Kevin Sheedy duly made the challenge even more insurmountable by moving all other forwards out of the area and thus leaving Salmon and our man to duel in the goalsquare. Five goals later the newcomer's confidence was shattered and he was replaced, never to play another game of AFL football.

The above situation shows no understanding of the pressures facing a young player when they commence a career at the top level, and confirms the need to investigate ways to make the transition from junior to senior ranks less daunting. It is the purpose of this article to outline some of the issues that surround a player trying to establish themselves in elite sport.

Entering environment

It is important to understand the attitude of everyone involved in the early stages of this transition from promising recruit to elite player.

THE NEW PLAYER

Naturally there is uncertainty in the minds of most players: *Am I good enough to compete with these superstars?*

As a result most will be a little tentative, nervous, perhaps even shy. They are reluctant to speak their minds and probably adopt a conservative approach to all tasks to prevent them making a fool of themselves in front of the group. A few may be so brash and cocky that they think they can do anything. These are rare, however, and even if they do display this bravado, underneath there usually is a layer of insecurity/uncertainty.

It is important to understand that almost all of these young players are coming from an environment in which they have dominated, even bullied, opponents throughout their sporting lives. They have often played in midfield roles, won best and fairest awards as they rack up possessions at will. It takes a big shift in their thinking to cope with being a 'bit' player as they inevitably have to do initially. »

THE EXPERIENCED PLAYER

There are usually two approaches. The first is using a mentor who goes out of their way to make the youngster feel comfortable. The mentor remembers his own time as a recruit and is determined to make it easier for any young player entering the organisation. He introduces himself to the player, may invite him out for a coffee or juice, and offers to pick him up for training. He gives advice freely, takes him aside for one-on-one coaching, and invites and values his input at meetings. I was once told a story that former Carlton captain Stephen Kernahan picked up a recruit to take him to training in his early days at the club. Imagine how good that would be for a young player to have such wisdom and leadership to guide him through his orientation at the club.

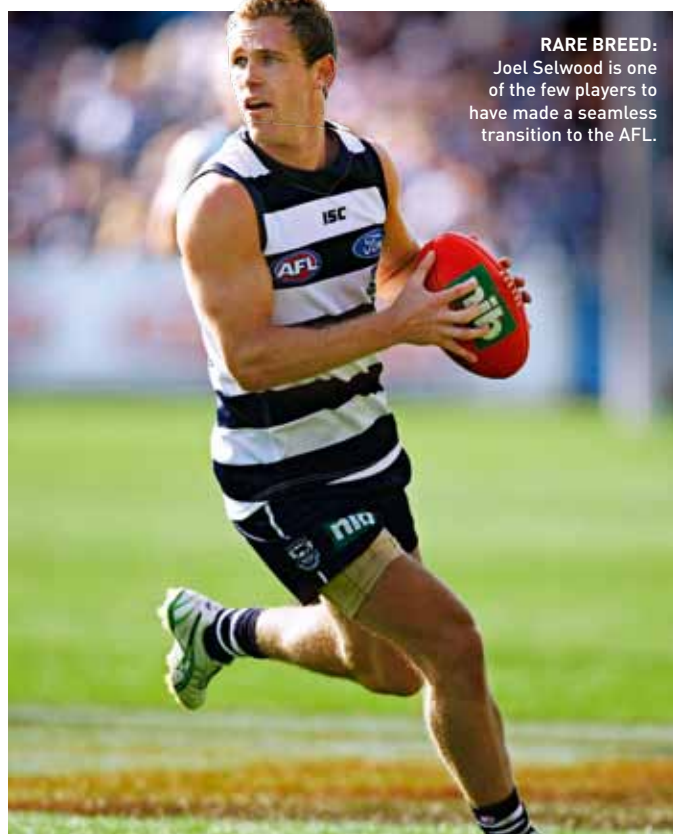
Although not common, on the other side of the coin, there is the more self-centred individual who may see this new player as a threat to his career. He goes out of his way to make it difficult for this new player to feel comfortable. He adopts the view that new players need to earn their stripes, putting them down whenever an opportunity arises, ridiculing their input at meetings, feeling they should be seen and not heard. He may abuse them for making a mistake which might see the player lose confidence and perhaps not take the risks necessary to showcase his talent. He may isolate the player in social settings. In short, he does nothing to make this transition easy.

The coach and selectors

It must be expected that young players will have deficiencies. You can be disappointed that you don't have another John Coleman (that ages me, doesn't it?), or you can embrace the challenge of developing the new kid to perform well on your footy block. We often throw new players in the deep end and see how they handle it. We need to be careful about compartmentalising them at this point.



SETTLING IN:
Senior players can help a new player's transition into a club by acting as their mentor.



RARE BREED:
Joel Selwood is one of the few players to have made a seamless transition to the AFL.

Some examples include: 'He's got some skill but lacks a bit of ticker'; or 'she clearly can't handle playing in defence on top players'. Have faith in your development program and allow some time for the players to show their wares.

If a player is selected in a team then you have a choice of giving them some security by promising them a few games or you can turn them into a yo-yo player, who plays one game in the firsts and is dropped the next week. Preferably you would give them a few games to adjust rather than dropping them after just one game.

Sometimes, however, it may be prudent to give players a brief taste of a higher level to gradually prepare them for the pressures of performance at that level. Such an instance may occur when a team is overloaded with players nearing the end of their careers. Rather than wait for them to retire all at once and then introduce new talent, a group of youngsters may be given brief experiences at the level over several seasons and, thus, make the transition into an inexperienced team less daunting for both players and the club. When the older players retire, then the club would have a group coming through who had played maybe 20 games rather than having to start from scratch with some.

For instance, at Geelong at the moment there are many top players who perhaps have less than three years left in their careers. Geelong has blooded several youngsters to this point and by the time the Milburns, Lings and Coreys have retired they should have a group of young players who have been exposed to the level and who should be ready to handle the pressure. In this case, there can be a justification for creating a yo-yo mentality with young players, but such a plan needs to be spelt out to these players so they understand the long-term benefits for the club and do not lose confidence as a result of being dropped often during this 'acclimatisation' process.

It is important to understand that these youngsters are about to be bombarded with all sorts of advice on their games, some of which can be conflicting. They need to be provided with a mentor to help them 'filter' this information to avoid confusion.

The new kid appears on the footy block

THE CHOICES FOR THE NEW KID

I can expect to walk into the organisation and be treated like a king by everybody, protected from threatening situations, and be given opportunities OR can expect to fight for a game and can be intent on working tirelessly to improve my game. Other choices include:

- Be ready for a 'bit' role or expect to play in the same prime positions as you always have. Whatever the cards that are dealt, embrace your role and do it well.
- Be a listener who has an appetite for learning or be a 'know all'. Some youngsters appear so cocky that they give the impression that they know it all. Not a good way to start with a team as most have had to work hard for an extended period to acquire wisdom and skill in the game. 'Know alls' are not respected and are often the source of 'put downs' from their superiors. Having said that, it is important that new kids have confidence in themselves – perhaps quiet confidence is the best way of describing it.
- Be prepared to adapt your style or be set in your ways. 'This is the way I play' indicates a player who is very rigid and not open to advice. While it is important to know your game, at a young age it is perhaps in your best interests to be exploring ways to improve your game either technically, physically or mentally. Everyone needs to understand that changes will invariably lead to an initial drop in performance. It takes time to consolidate change and patience is the key. Again be careful about trying to change too much. Be mindful of the danger of paralysis by over-analysis.
- Try to gain respect by displaying a solid commitment to improvement or be one of the boys. In all clubs there will be a core of players who love a joke and who perhaps are less committed than others. Some of these may even be good players – they love to party and welcome a new kid into their group as a 'drinking buddy'. Players seeking this approach may become good friends to some but it is doubtful they will gain universal respect from players and staff.
- Be willing to do more or just follow what the senior players do. Young players need to understand that the physical and mental

demands for players in the twilight of their careers are very different from their own demands. Senior players know their game and their preparation needs. They need more time to recover physically from training and games. The young player should be intent on loading themselves so they can continually improve while senior players are intent on maintaining their ability and fitness as long as possible. So it is not always wise for youngsters to follow the path of the most senior players in the group.

- Be willing to show flair or be conservative. This is a very difficult question to resolve. Ideally, you want players with flair to be encouraged to display it. However, observation of these players often leads to disappointment as decision-making and reading of the game is not as advanced as the more experienced players. Consequently they may be over-attacking and not cover themselves for possible turnovers, or they may square the ball into the corridor too early into congested areas and open up the opposition's path to goal on the rebound. If a player does have exceptional flair and creativity like Cyril Rioli, it is important that some licence is given. You must be prepared for some errors initially as the player gains confidence at the level.
- Be a tagger or a creator. In football terms, it is often best for young players to learn more about the game by playing on a top player and attempting to follow the player wherever he goes. In this way you learn about the positioning and work ethic of the greats. A tagger puts in a lot of effort but keeps to a simple game plan. In the short term, while players are still earning their stripes and settling in to the level they are perhaps best adopting a tagger's role. It's nice to have a player come in and show their range of skills from day one, but the odds are against you ... unless your name is Joel Selwood!
- Be a sledger or not. Best to shut up and just focus on your role.
- Be composed or obviously nervous. An obvious choice but important for new players to show they are outwardly composed. Most of us are nervous!

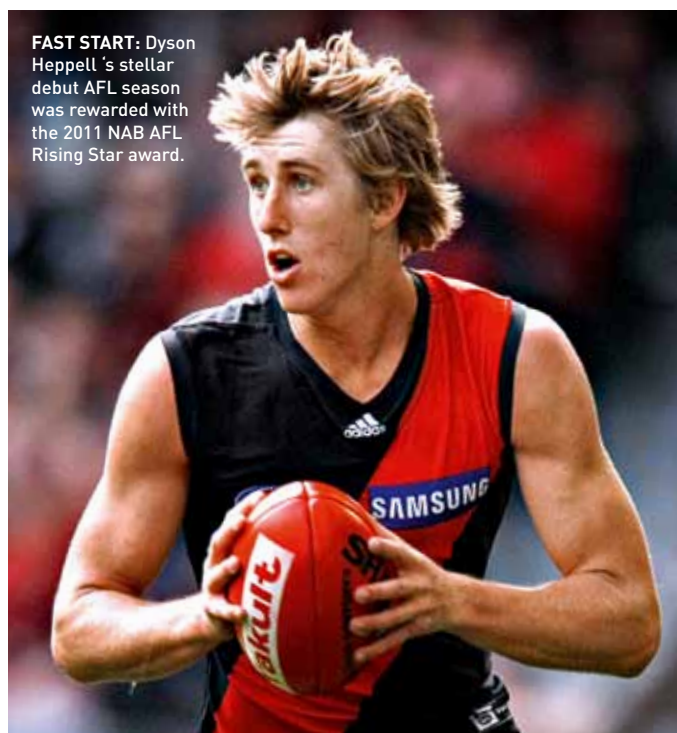
The senior player reacting to the new kid on the block

The following list outlines some guidelines for senior players to make it easier for players to settle into a club:

- Encourage, don't put players down.
- Make them aware of the commitment needed to work in this group.
- Watch them and offer advice.
- Invite and respect their comments in the group.
- Spend some time one on one with them away from training and games.
- Be a mentor not a monster.
- Show faith in them.
- Calmly talk to those who appear to know it all – strive to get rid of that attitude. Show that you can have fun without being the life of all-night parties!

This article is an attempt to understand the challenges faced when new players transition from a lower grade of football to a higher level. This is not merely a problem for the AFL, as the situation is common at community level too. We can do better in easing a player into an organisation by not leaving them stranded on a vacant block to fend for themselves. Build a home for the player on the club's block and nurture the player's progress into an established mature player by implementing some of the approaches mentioned in this article. **CE**

FAST START: Dyson Heppell's stellar debut AFL season was rewarded with the 2011 NAB AFL Rising Star award.



Vale Allan Jeans

1933-2011

JEANS A master of keeping it simple

Allan Jeans was never one for lavish statements, false praise or complicated game-plans. He stuck to the basics of honesty and integrity.

BY GEOFF SLATTERY

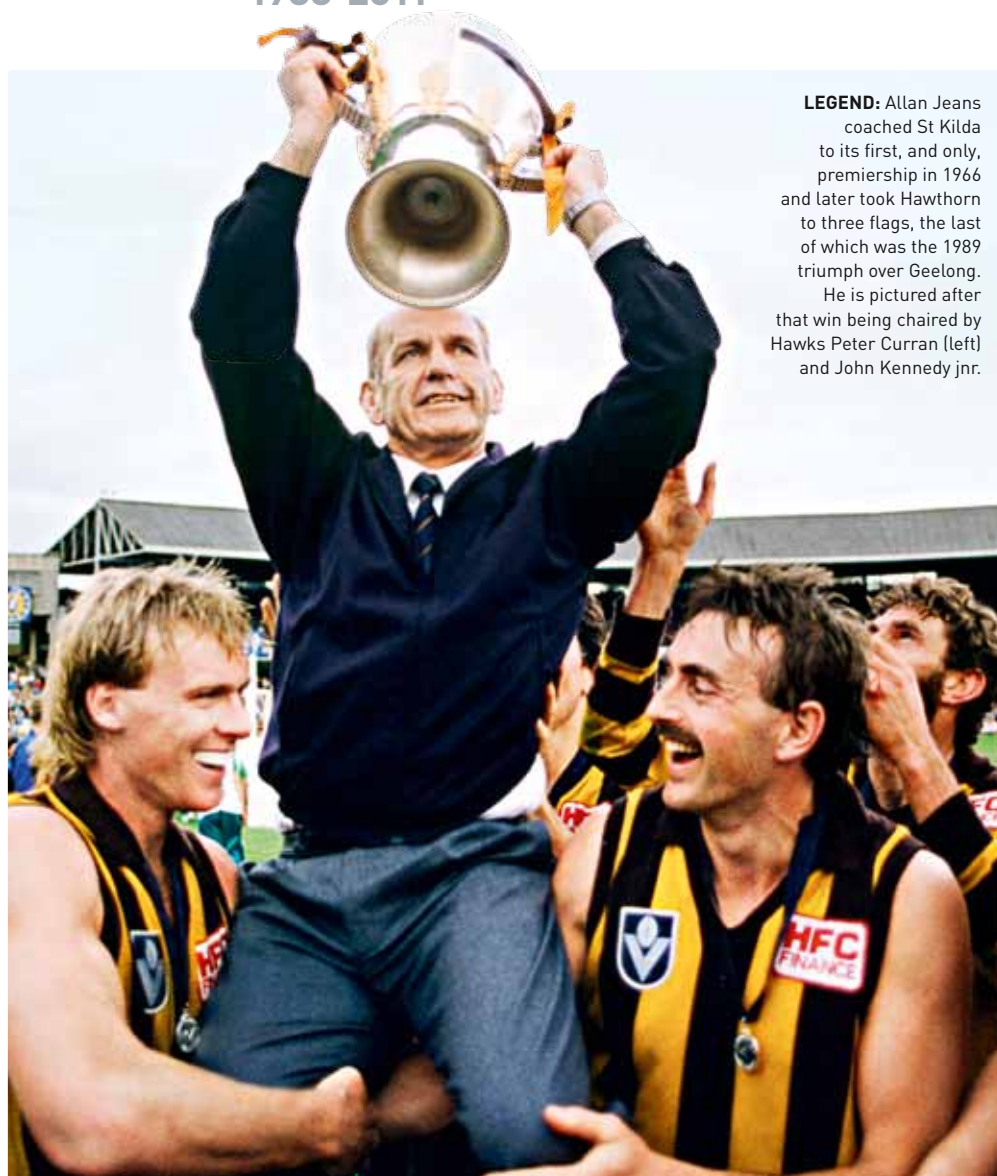
▶ Allan Jeans was a unique character, a coach who traversed the huge gap between the old-fashioned hot gospel methods of the pre-1980s, into the manager of men, strategist, psychologist, motivator and marketer that defines modern coaching.

He is severely underrated as a strategist and analyst of the game. He had a remarkable capacity to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of his playing group, as he drove those strengths to the maximum and massaged any weaknesses until there were few, if any, who did not contribute to the team's total need.

In a 1982 interview I had with him while at *The Age*, he described that philosophy: "Tactics," he said, "is exploiting the opposition, while covering up your own weaknesses."

As he so often did, he expanded his thesis with an allegory: "League football is like driving a car. We can all drive a car if we take our time – first gear, second gear, third, fourth. But League football is doing it at 150 miles an hour. That's all. There's no mystery to it."

Jeans's systems and his statements supporting those systems were often described as simple, that he had a simple view of what many believed to be a complex game. The reality is that for many the game is complex;



LEGEND: Allan Jeans coached St Kilda to its first, and only, premiership in 1966 and later took Hawthorn to three flags, the last of which was the 1989 triumph over Geelong. He is pictured after that win being chaired by Hawks Peter Curran (left) and John Kennedy jnr.

'TACTICS IS EXPLOITING THE OPPOSITION, WHILE COVERING UP YOUR OWN WEAKNESSES'

ALLAN JEANS

for Jeans it was simple, and he was able to convince his players to follow simple but unbreakable processes to achieve success.

Add to that his remarkable capacity as an orator (recalled so well in various video grabs), although for most times, that blood-chilling delivery was a mere reminder to his players of what he had preached through

the months, weeks and days leading up to the moment. Just as he expected from his players, he was able to bring out his best motivational lines for the big games.

In 2006, I convinced him to submit to an interview with Ben Collins for a book called *Champions: Conversations with Great Players & Coaches of Australian Football*.

It took a lot of arm-twisting. I recall sharing a lift from the car park to the Palladium at Crown for the 2005 Brownlow Medal presentation. Fortunately, Allan was with his daughter, and it was clear that she too wanted him to commit his thoughts on the game to posterity. He eventually succumbed, as much as a personal favour to me as anything. He was never a man to blow his own trumpet.

We're grateful he did agree to the moment – something he enjoyed doing in the end – as some of the lines from that

book are gold, and will apply to the game for all time.

They include his much-quoted line comparing the basics of the game to the cooking of sausages: "The fundamentals are like sausages: you can grill them, fry them, boil them, curry them, you can even put apple sauce on them. You can present them any way you like, but they're still sausages."

Jeans went on to explain his regular use of allegory: "As a coach, you're saying the same thing week in, week out, and after the players have heard it for 10 years, you look in the eyes of certain players and can tell some are

thinking: 'I've heard the same thing a million times from this silly old bastard'."

"You've got to tell a little story to get your point across. You can't keep saying: 'Be first to the ball! Get to the bottom of the pack! Chase! Tackle! Recover out of the air!' If you do, the message loses its impact on players.

"One of the hardest parts of coaching is re-packaging the same message and telling the

right story at the right time.

"At half-time of the 1989 Grand Final, we had a number of players injured – Dermott Brereton had broken ribs, John Platten was concussed and Robert DiPierdomenico had broken ribs and a punctured lung.

"But we were desperate to win back-to-back premierships. I told them a story and the example I used was a pair of shoes. If you settle for second-best, you'll regret it later because it wasn't anywhere near as good.

"The moral of the story was: if you want the ultimate reward, you must pay the full price. There's no second chance. You can't take it back the next day, or ask to replay the game.

Pay the price now – whatever the cost. All I did was re-package the fundamentals."

Fundamentals was a favourite word of his – no doubt because he could split the game so easily into its multiple components. Watching and analysing the game was easy for him, and something he retained to the end.

I am so glad I made the effort to visit Allan and his wife Mary prior to Allan's death, in the company of Sam Newman. He was delighted to see us, just another pair among his multitude of family, friends, colleagues and associates, who had visited him in care (in the Allan Jeans wing, no less) since his condition deteriorated. The mind was as sharp as ever, the love of the game ongoing, the opinions on play and rules and players considered and still delightfully put. The big screen was just about his only outlet as his body was clearly flagging.

He told us then that he was struggling, that his quality of life was diminishing by the day. He shrugged his shoulders. He could see the end fast approaching, but he was content with his lot, sharing it to the end with his loving and beloved Mary, revelling in the reflections, but still looking ahead. As he always did. **CE**

IF YOU WANT THE ULTIMATE REWARD, YOU MUST PAY THE FULL PRICE

ALLAN JEANS



Allan Jeans

→ Played 77 games for St Kilda from 1955-59 before coaching the Saints from 1961-76 (including the club's only premiership in 1966), Hawthorn from 1981-87 and 1989-90 and Richmond in 1992. He also coached Victoria and New South Wales. He is a member of the Australian Football Hall of Fame (coach).

TRIBUTES TO ALLAN JEANS



« JOHN KENNEDY Hawthorn premiership coach

"He was a great coach, a great man and a wonderful friend."



« LEIGH MATTHEWS Hawthorn premiership captain

"He was a great man. It's a simple statement but not one you can say about a lot of people.

He was the best psychologist and man manager I have ever seen. He wasn't trained in psychology, but he knew so much about people and how best to relate to them. As a coach, he understood the need to create havoc on the field. At Hawthorn, we trained the way we played."



« DAVID PARKIN Hawthorn premiership captain and coach

"This man had as broad an influence as the great John Kennedy and that is saying something.

How lucky Hawthorn was/is to have had two outstanding people influence the playing group and the club in a broader sense over four decades. His legacy goes well beyond football. He influenced so many lives on and off the field in those clubs for people to become far better people because of the values he brought and the behaviours he exhibited."

First President of AFCA

➤ In 1987 Allan Jeans became the inaugural president of the Australian Football Coaches Association, declaring: "I am proud to have been invited to offer my services to a body which will further strengthen the foundations of our game by improving the general standard of coaching and providing a level of coaching necessary for players to achieve their potential".

In his time, AFCA Victoria grew to service thousands of coaches through a journal (*Coaching Update*, the forerunner of *Coaching Edge*), seminars and a strong coach education program. He was president until 1995, when David Parkin took over the role.

Allan's contribution and influence on coaching and coach education has been enormous and is best illustrated with his philosophy on the game, which he so eloquently presented to coaches in courses throughout Victoria.

His coaching philosophy continues to stand the test of time and forms the basis of sound coaching principles for all coaches. This is Allan Jean's timeless legacy to Australian Football—a fundamental approach to coaching and caring for the players who play our great game. His philosophy was about life and how you conducted yourself as coaches and players, not just about the game itself.

It will not just be for the "three phases of the game" that he will be remembered, but for his willingness to support and encourage others in their coaching journeys, whether they were coaching junior players, in the RecLink program or elite players.

Until recently Allan presented at the AFL Victoria Level Two coaching course, where his oratory skills commanded respect and motivated the participants.



The five fundamentals of modern football

At its core, Australian Football is a simple game. As much as strategies and tactics evolve, certain basic tenets of the game don't change. Here are the modern game's five most fundamental areas. BY DANNY RYAN

This article describes what I believe are the essential areas of Australian Football as it is currently played. These thoughts and observations are derived from my experiences playing, coaching and studying the game. Naturally, there are other important areas in football including:

- Player recovery and rehabilitation.
- Mental preparation.
- Learning and discovery (feedback systems).
- Opposition analysis (forward scouting).
- Player welfare (your players as people).
- Media/sponsorship.
- Inspired leadership.

These and other topics are worthy of their own articles, however the following topics are more about how the game is played, and how we as coaches should plan our practice to suit.

Contested ball

First and foremost is the contest. Regardless of how coaches, players and rule-makers may change elements of how the game is played and viewed, it is still essentially a physical contest. Essentially, it is two combatants on opposing teams, in specific situations, both trying to assist their teams to win by winning a disputed ball, maintaining or regaining possession. This is the essence of our great game and what makes it such an enthralling spectacle. To compete successfully at any level of football, players must have the courage, bravery and the 'stomach' to physically compete with another player who is directly opposing them. Although there are various degrees of this instinctive aggression, any player who wants to succeed in the game will display this significant trait. As coaches it is important to ensure our players get a chance to practise contesting the ball so, when they need to perform on match day, they are ready and comfortable with the ensuing fanaticism of opponents and pressure situations. Games and drills where there is pressure applied will help to prepare them. Most players are capable

with the ball, out in space, or cruising through easy drills—it is when there is a contest or a form of pressure applied, that real improvements in both skill execution and decision-making can be made.

Decision-making

Following on directly from contested ball is the topic of decision-making. Obviously once a player gains possession, the next thought is 'What am I going to do with it?' Depending on the situation where possession was gained, there will be varying amounts of pressure and therefore an increased or decreased need to make that decision quickly. The aim is to do something positive for the team with the ball, either through passing it by hand or foot accurately to a teammate, or scoring a goal. No player takes the field with the express aim of making mistakes and turning the ball over to the opposition. It is only through applied pressure (real or perceived) or a skill error that these turnovers occur. Players who can cope with those pressures and still execute the skills of the game have a distinct advantage. Coaches must then design ways to minimise turnovers in matches by incorporating game-like situations in practice sessions. Various types of games (handball game, short-pass game, forward scout) can assist in improving a player's decision-making, as they encompass many complementary facets, such as contested ball and skill execution, in a pressure situation. Coaches can design games (or empower competent players to design them) that challenge the players and develops their ball skills at the same time. Also, if you have access to video footage of your games (or practice sessions) you can use this to show highlight packages to players as you talk them through what an ideal decision might have been, compared to what actually happened. When players see themselves on screen, making both good and bad decisions using the ball, it provides an invaluable opportunity to reinforce, improve or correct their decision-making skills.

Ball skills by hand or foot

The ability to hit targets in modern football is of paramount importance. Gone are the days where we would kick to a 50/50 contest and hope, or even back in our teammate, to win possession. Today we are aiming to pass the ball to maintain possession. If the chances of a teammate getting the ball are not better than 70/30, most players will keep

BALL-WINNER: Carlton captain Chris Judd is one of the AFL's best players at stoppage contests.



possession and look for a better option. And when we do pass the ball, we need our players to have the skill to place the ball to a position of advantage, so those odds are maintained or increased. The ability to pass the ball, long or short, with 'air' or 'speared', perfectly weighted to an oncoming option or running away on various angles, by hand or foot, is arguably the defining measure of the modern player. To reach and maintain the highest standard possible requires constant practice, both in a controlled situation, which allows the players to 'over-concentrate' on technical skill execution, and in a random situation that allows them to further develop their vision to find targets and the sense of 'weight' needed to pass the ball to the advantage of a teammate.

Controlled activities

This refers to the time within your practice session when you strip back the uncertainties of match day, such as opposition players and the pressure they apply, and concentrate on pure skill. Usually this involves basic kicking and handball drills, which can be as simple or intricate as you want to design. But the focus is on practising the pure skill element. For some players these types of drills can be quite tedious or boring and it is probably best to have a set of four to five basic skill drills that you can call upon for any particular practice session. It is important to reiterate to your players that the hardest part of these drills is the mental application required. As the coach you can challenge the players: can they concentrate over the given period of time to maintain the highest level of skill execution? For instance, "We are looking for 99 out of 100, nine out of 10 will not do!" You might incorporate a fun element: "Can we make it to 100 clean passes?"

This is also the time that, as the coach, you can observe and advise individual players in regards to technical aspects of their skill execution. It is a great time for a player to work on a deficiency in a controlled environment, which allows a focus on correcting technical errors.

Random activities

These drills are more open to players' own interpretations and can obviously crossover with the decision-making area (above). They usually do not involve cones or markers, but are designed to teach the players to practise their skills in a random manner. The old-fashioned drill called 'circle work', or 'random footy' as I like to call it, is a perfect example. These activities can also be designed to teach or reinforce a particular style of play you want the team to learn, practise or re-visit, as you will most likely be using the majority of your training area. It is important to explain to your players that you are looking for them to pass the ball to the advantage of their teammate (preferably on the full) and that they should be working on the two main aspects of vision (to find the best option) and the weight of their pass, as well as their technical execution.



Style

This is about deciding on your team's style of play and then teaching your players how you want them to 'flow' the ball. Your style, or styles, (most modern teams will have at least two styles) will be a combination of at least two factors: (1) the physical makeup of your squad (tall vs small, fast vs slow, run and carry players vs kickers); (2) whether your squad is best suited to being attacking or defensive (players with natural flair vs honest footballers). A good way to identify a team's basic style is to watch their kick-ins. Every team would like to go 'coast-to-coast' and score from its own kick-in, but how do they achieve that with 18 opposition players trying to stop that happening? While it is impossible to fully predict what the other team will do, it is possible to instill a distinct style of play into your own team, which becomes reliable and instinctive in the heat of matches.

There are several questions you need to ask to develop a set of directions/styles for your squad. Do we go 'outside' around the boundary or 'inside' using the corridor? How fast do we move the ball in different parts of the ground? Do we kick the ball long or short? Do we move quickly to our forwards, or take our time to find the best option? You might also like to think about 'starting points' and 'what-if' strategies across all parts of the ground. These also form a crucial part of your style. »

SURE SKILLS:

Hawthorn skipper
Luke Hodge is an elite
ball-user by hand and foot.

Starting points are especially crucial as opportunities for players to put themselves in a position of advantage over their direct opponent in any given contest. To coaching, for example, you might direct your backmen to have a starting point of 'arm on, inside' when they are standing their man. What-if scenarios are designed to give your players an alternative, or plan B to go to, when the opposition does something specific which you need to count on. For example, when the opposition ruckman is dropping back in the 'hole' in front of your full-forward, a what-if scenario outcome might be to get all the forwards to bunch in around the defender in a huddle.

Once you have established the ideal outcomes/scenarios for these questions, as well as some alternative outcomes, you can set about teaching your squad. When they have learned, practised and finally tested them against legitimate opposition,

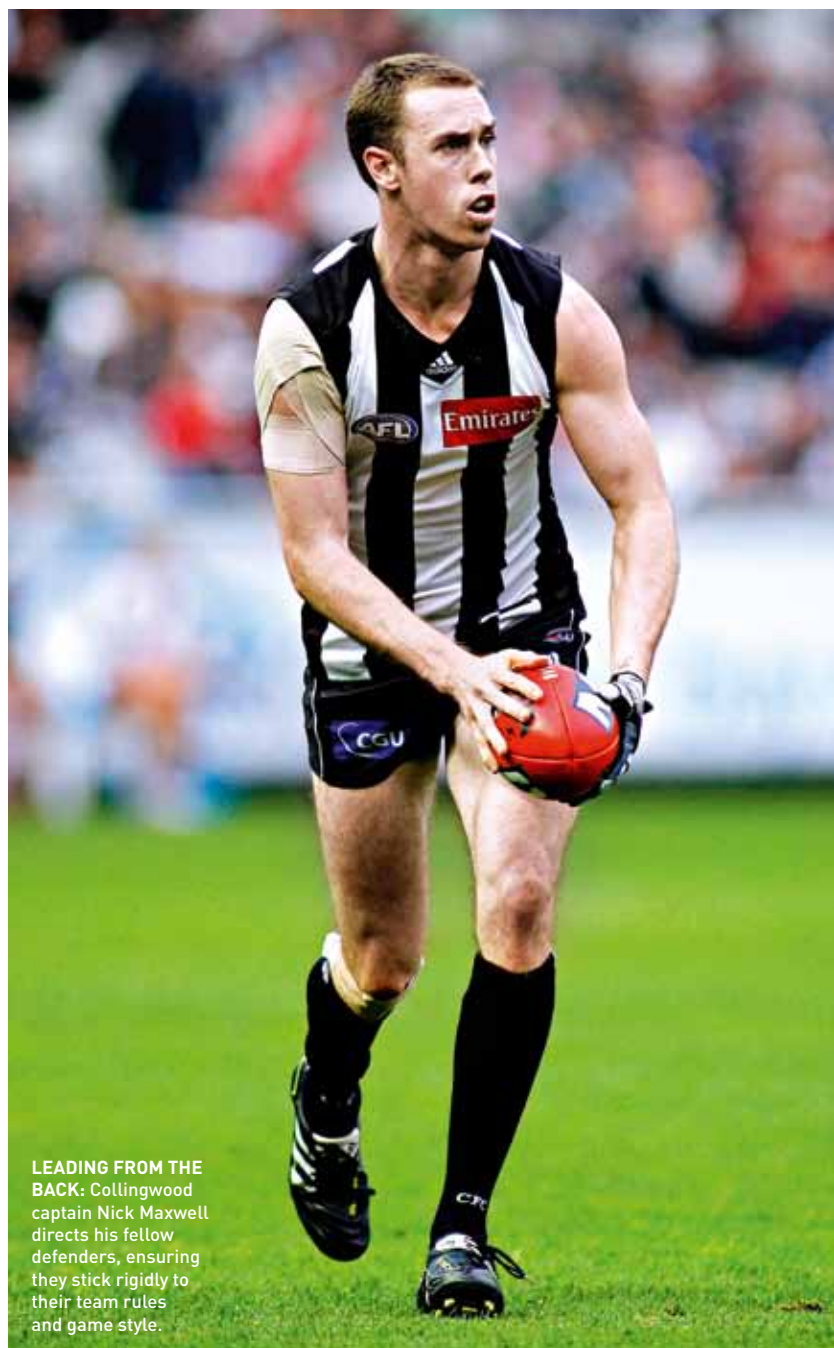
you will start to entrench them as your team's style. The use of games within your practice session is a great way of teaching and reinforcing the agreed style(s). Within these competitive situations, players can start to rehearse elements of the style that they will use in matches, e.g. handballing backwards out of packs or going 'outside' in the back half, before coming back 'inside' in the front half, or kicking to a lead to the 'fat' side when entering the forward 50 area versus hitting the hotspot.

Games are also a great way of empowering your players to 'coach' themselves as an additional task within the execution of the game. For example, you might play a handball game, where you have asked one team to play around the sidelines and use mainly safe options against the other team, who you have asked to play straight up the corridor and to take as many risks as possible. You also inform each team of the alternative style and let them decide when they will switch styles within the game, usually to counter the opposition team. When you have finalised your predominant game style and also decided on one or two alternative styles, then practised and played to these styles with a degree of success, your team can start to rely upon its style. This means you can measure the performance and outcomes from matches against the way the players played on that day. Did they stick to their agreed style of play? What was the outcome? If they did not adhere to their agreed style(s) did the team have a different outcome? Your team KPIs can then be built around the agreed style(s) and used to keep the team on track.

For example, an element of the team style might be, we run and link with each other in the back half of the ground, and the corresponding KPI would likely be handball receives. As coach you can simply refer to your statistics and if they show a low number of a particular stat, it might indicate that the team has not adhered to its particular style, for that match or quarter. You might also choose to embody your style(s) within a set of team traits. These can be devised with the players' input and can be as simple as two or three traits in three different areas. For example, defensive, attacking and overall traits—these traits apply to every player in your team/club and are paramount. They are the foundations on which the team's styles are built and the players must believe in, practise and play to them. They are the things that will identify who and what your team is, they become the essence of your team's 'brand'.

Specifics: strategies/tactics for the backline, midfield and forward line

While it is important that all players are aware of both the defensive and attacking parts of their own games, there are many strategies and tactics that belong distinctly to certain areas on the football field and therefore need specific instruction and practise. For example, a player does not play the



LEADING FROM THE BACK: Collingwood captain Nick Maxwell directs his fellow defenders, ensuring they stick rigidly to their team rules and game style.

same way when asked to perform as a key backman compared to a stint in the midfield. Teaching a tall defender how to bump and tangle with an opponent, without giving away a free kick is an art in itself and warrants time being spent on learning that particular craft. It is similar to goalkicking for a forward who is striving for a high percentage of conversions, or an on-baller who needs to work with on-ball partners on refining their combinations. Some of the specifics that you might look to teach your players could include the following: **Backs:** bodywork (bumping and tangling), anticipation, closing speed and angles to the contest, starting points, kick-ins (us), kick-outs (them), shepherding and screening, spoiling, third man up, use of the boundary line, rolling on and off opponents, defensive transition, etc; **Midfielders:** centre bounces, ball-ups, boundary throw-ins, scrummages, knowing and practising roles, kick-ins (us), kick-outs (them), goalkicking, starting points, rolling on and off opponents, interchange, running the triangle (not trying to get to every stoppage), wingers, etc; **Forwards:** creating space, subtle blocks, sacrificial leading, starting points, set-ups for up-field stoppages, goalkicking (set shots, snaps, broken-play shooting, front-and-square crumbing, soccer shots), leading, marking, bodywork, kick-ins (us), kick-outs (them), corralling, etc. A question you as coach need to ask of your squad is, "How many players will specialise in a given position (e.g. ruckmen) and how many need to be adaptable and learn to play several positions (e.g. full-forward and ruck-rover)?" The answer to this question will allow you to plan the 'specifics' element of your practice sessions accordingly. Do you break your squad into three different groups (backs / mids / forwards) and let them split up to work on specific strategies/tactics unique to those areas, or do you rotate the entire squad through three or more drills that cover those unique areas? I would suggest that the answer is a 60/40 split of both needs. In the case of specifics, your small on-ballers are not going to need to bump and tangle with an opposing full-forward, like your key tall backmen need to. Likewise, you do not expect your tall backmen to be on the bottom of stoppages. With the flexibility of most players in modern football, there is a high probability a tall backman might end up playing at the opposite end at some stage, and so players need to learn the specifics that apply across the ground as well as their own specialist areas. It is also important all players know and practise generic things like goalkicking (set-ups and strategies for both kick-ins (us) and kick-outs (them)).

As the coach, you need to design your practice so that the players will know the important specifics that apply to those individual areas and will not be lost if you move them into a position in that particular area, as well as allowing further time for players who spend the majority of time in a given area to further refine the specifics of that area. This will increase their individual skill proficiency and benefit the team overall.



FLEXIBLE: Although Brent Guerra plays primarily in defence, he pinch-hits on the Hawks' forward line occasionally so has to be across the particular strategies in place there.

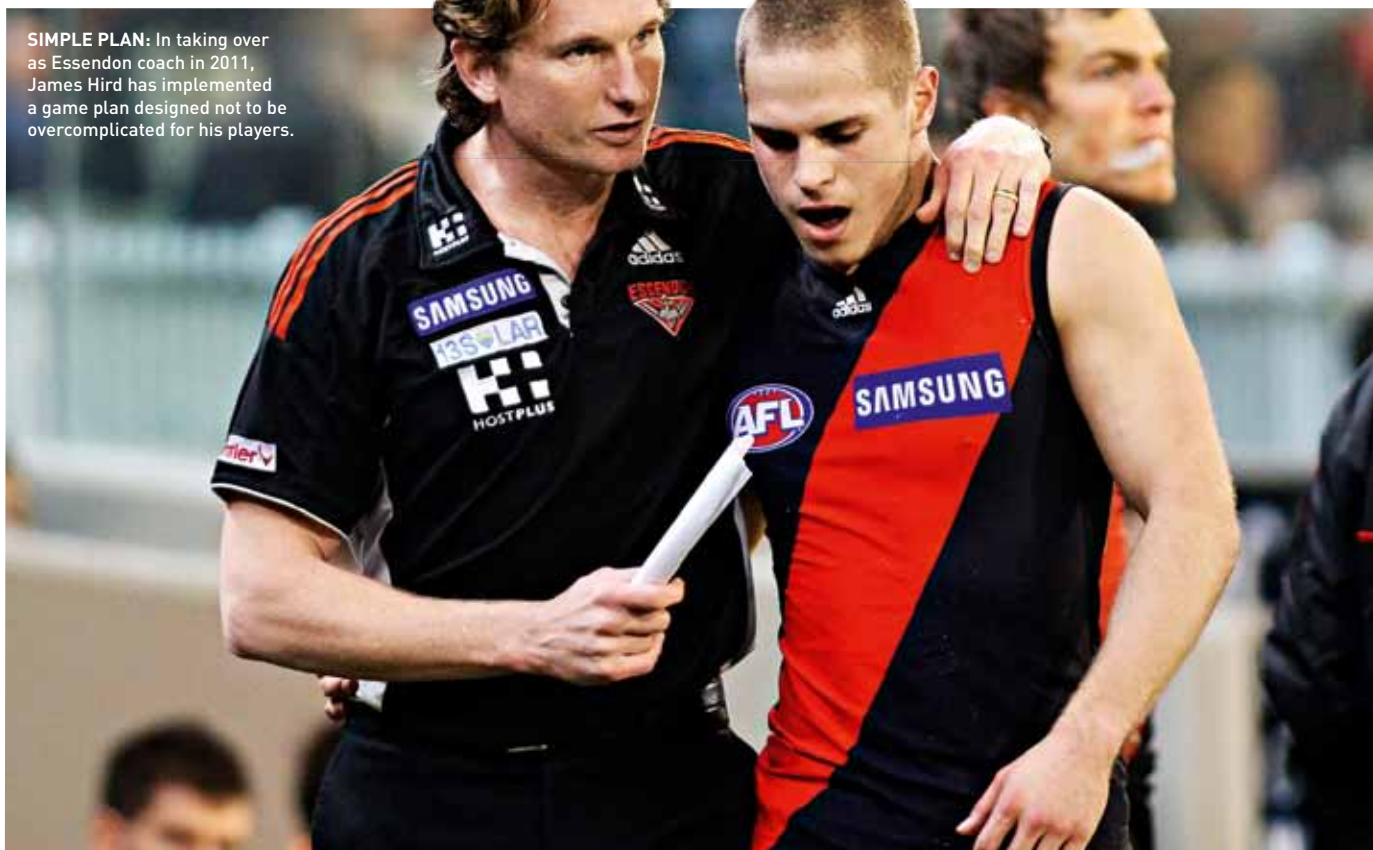
Conclusion

I have discussed what I think are the five fundamentals of modern football. Most coaches will have their own view on whether there are other fundamentals. Hopefully this article has provoked some thought and discussion among coaches at all levels, as well as your own assistant coaches, players and other support staff. Even if you decide that you have some different fundamentals, then I will have succeeded in my attempts to encourage coaches to think a little deeper about our game and how it is played. I think you will find that once you start to investigate your own individual thoughts and ideas, as well as listening to those you work with closely, you will indeed deepen your own knowledge about the game. The thirst for knowledge is indeed the essence of man and as an Australian Football coach you are charged with passing on the knowledge that you think is relevant to your players as you strive to improve them as both footballers and people. Good luck with your continued pursuit of knowledge and passing on what you learn. **CE**

Danny Ryan is player development manager at St Kilda Football Club.

This article was written as part of the requirements for AFL High Performance Coach Accreditation. At the time of writing Danny was an assistant coach with the NSW/ACT RAMS.

SIMPLE PLAN: In taking over as Essendon coach in 2011, James Hird has implemented a game plan designed not to be overcomplicated for his players.



Coaching is a balancing act (PART 2)

The best coaches are able to juggle the competing needs for innovation and simplicity, analysis and natural instinct, and repetition and variety. BY KEN DAVIS

▶ One of the most important skills in any field of endeavour is the ability to strike a balance between two opposing forces. While extreme viewpoints are worthy of consideration before developing a philosophical position on an issue, rarely do the extremes satisfy the needs of a situation. For example, the oft debated nature/nurture issue clearly illustrates that both are important contributors to human behaviour. We do things both because of our genetic make-up and the environment we are brought up in. Our behaviour is then a balance between hereditary and environmental factors.

In the previous edition of *Coaching Edge*, I outlined how administrators and coaches in their search for enhanced performance are prone to emphasise a particular aspect of coaching, to the detriment of other parts of the program. As examples, I discussed how team needs have to be balanced with individual demands; how training sessions need a balance between skill, physical, mental and strategic requirements; and how a coach needs to strike a balance between using positive reinforcement and criticism to motivate their athletes.

Many coaches choose one end of the continuum and while they can be successful, if narrow in their approach, ultimately they do themselves a disservice by operating at the extremes. For example,

if a coach bases all decisions on team needs, then they are failing to treat each player individually. This must impact on the development of that player and ultimately affect overall team performance.

In this article, I shall further examine the 'see-saws' that coaches have to weigh up in order to achieve optimum performance from themselves and their athletes. When you consider all of these balancing acts you realise why coaching is such a complex task.

On a daily basis, they have to juggle their time to satisfy the needs of significant others and themselves. Family, friends, work, coaching, and personal recreation all pull the coach in different directions. Spend too much time on one and the others suffer. The coaching 'addict' may well do a great job of coaching, but personal relationships with family and friends may suffer. Conversely, a coach with pressures at work and at home may never be able to devote enough time to coaching successfully. The 'balanced' coach works to create an environment where time and priorities are spread throughout all competing demands.

From a strategic viewpoint, coaches have to consider balancing many continuums in developing their approach to the challenge of coaching. The list below is not intended to be comprehensive but merely illustrates the wide variety of issues a coach needs to consider.

Innovative versus traditional

Some coaches are very strong on traditional methods of training and motivation, while others are very innovative to the point of ignoring tried-and-true approaches. For example, methods adopted by successful teams are often perpetuated just because they were linked to that success. Scrutiny of the effectiveness of these drills/approaches when compared to others is often ignored. New drills emerge that potentially prepare the players more specifically for the game, but the traditional coach finds it difficult to change their methods. As the game evolves, so too must the drills used to prepare players for that game. It took an age for many coaches to discard 'circle work' in their training. Granted, some modern teams appear at times to be going around in circles, but for the better teams, ball movement in a game is rarely performed in a circle work pattern.

Of course, this involves practising the skills of kicking, marking, and handballing, but they should be practised in a way that simulates the game. To devise such drills requires a creative process of observing the patterns of play adopted in the game and then setting up drills that simulate these patterns at game intensity. **Many coaches with teaching backgrounds have been particularly good at this because it is such a large part of being an effective physical education teacher.** As an example, David Wheadon, physical educationalist and renowned skills coach at many AFL clubs, has both developed his own drills and borrowed ideas from others in his constant quest for innovative and more specific ways of preparing players—see *Drills & Skills in Australian Football* by David Wheadon (available from the AFL).

Conversely, a coach who is so preoccupied with innovation may overlook the basics of the game. It is interesting to hear players talk of James Hird at Essendon in the early days of his coaching career. They speak of his simple game plan which makes sense particularly at the start of any coaching involvement. As time passes and basic structures and style are in place, perhaps coaches can afford to dabble with more imaginative strategies. Although it is difficult to judge from a distance, there have been a number of successful coaches who have coached with a very simple game plan. John Kennedy, Allan Jeans, Tom Hafey, Leigh Matthews and Denis Pagan produced disciplined teams that ruthlessly followed the team plan, achieving success more often than not. Other coaches such as Kevin Sheedy, Malcolm Blight, Ron Barassi and David Parkin have earned a reputation for being more adaptable with their game plans.

It seems to me that a blending of these approaches needs to exist in an ideal coaching world. Many young coaches have been so enthusiastic with their creative ideas that they have lost players who simply don't have the ability to cope with such concepts. Predictability comes with a set game plan, while potential chaos can occur with variable game plans.

Once again, a balanced view seems the ideal. By all means have simple, easy-to-follow structures in place, but always have a plan B to fall back on when the game is not going your way. Coaches with a penchant for the novel, imaginative, and creative may have to be harnessed to make sure they are not losing sight of the simple concepts that have been in place for years. On the other hand, coaches who stoically stick to traditional methods might be challenged to think outside the square in order to improve the team's performance and produce an all-round team that could adapt to anything opposition sides may present.



TRIED AND TRUE: Denis Pagan took North Melbourne to two premierships with a simple, long-kicking game plan.

An analytical versus laissez-faire approach

So often in sport we hear of players who claim they do not want to think too much about a game because it causes too much anxiety and hinders their performance. There is some merit in this view, but often it produces players who are difficult to coach to improve their performance. They don't like that phase when they struggle with their skills, as one inevitably does when trying to change something in their game. Rather than try to change, they prefer to merely rely on their instincts.

Some players, however, become too analytical and are often so tight and concerned about how they look that they lose fluency in their movement. These players sometimes become paralysed by overanalysis. Golfers inevitably seem to suffer from this malaise. They seem consumed with minute details in their swing. The much heralded demise of Ian Baker-Finch and perhaps also the recent swing changes of Tiger Woods are high-profile examples where overanalysis may have impacted on performance.

Coaches need to be aware of the dangers of both extremes presented here. Typically, coaches have been good to outstanding players who have developed considerable knowledge in their journey. Armed with this wisdom, they can often give too much feedback to a young player, which may confuse and overload them. From my experiences analytical players tend to be thinking people in other aspects of their lives. Clearly, this can help produce an athlete who is always aware of areas he/she needs to work on and is diligent in pursuing that improvement. However, there is no doubt that these players can become too analytical and therefore their movements tend to lack fluency because they are thinking their way through their skills, rather than letting them flow. »

FRESH START: Chris Scott (talking here to Travis Varcoe) took Geelong to a premiership in his first season as coach, his new voice and slightly revised game-plan helping to revitalise the Cats.



Alternatively, players who may have experienced such overanalysis become convinced that thinking about the sport is detrimental to their performance, and are therefore resistant to any tactics or techniques that might stretch their thinking. 'I just go out there and react instinctively and don't want to worry about thinking about what I might do in certain situations' is the mantra of so many I work with in sports psychology. My view, as you may have guessed, is that we need to have a balanced approach. Of course, you need to let things happen in the game, be relaxed and trust your skills. However, in order to improve you should certainly try to focus on aspects that logic says will improve your game. Importantly, not too much should be attempted at once and certainly players should practise and perfect the skill change before attempting it in a game situation. Going into a game with a focus on a particular way of playing is fine so long as it is matched by adequate preparation and an understanding that adaptive processes may need to be implemented if things are not going to plan.

The amount of repetition required to learn skills is opposed to the need for variety

A stickler for repetition may serve players well initially but boredom and staleness may prevent successful preparation and performance. I have heard elite coaches say that players have to get over the boredom of doing the same drills over and over. They argue that if you do these drills ad infinitum you will be drilled to perform that way in a game. Granted, it is hard to argue with coaches who have achieved outstanding success with such an approach. However, I will try!

The fact is although we may be working with serious and elite players, they are humans and not machines. Some players find

knowing what they will do at training to be comforting. I recently interviewed former Australian wicketkeeper Ian Healy and he said he liked to have exactly the same routine in preparation for a Test match. However, it is my belief that other players like the idea of turning up for practice, and being challenged and refreshed by innovative and varied approaches. Perhaps this is more important in non-professional football teams, where players are not actually going to work to play their game. Perhaps with professionals the argument for limited variety can hold more weight.

Recently, we have heard players embrace Geelong coach Chris Scott, who coached the Cats to the premiership in his first season. Most of those interviewed speak not so much about dramatic change in tactics but comment more about the value of a fresh face and different voice. A change in coach may produce such enthusiasm, but surely a coach who provides opportunities for assistant coaches to speak to the players, take training and introduce new drills can achieve the same outcome while retaining stability in the coaching direction of the club.

Once again, on balance a coach should be aware of the stimulus that new drills/ideas can have with certain players, but also be cognisant of the need to practise certain plays/skills repetitively so they become ingrained and able to withstand the pressure of competition.

In the next edition of *Coaching Edge*, more balance issues in coaching will be discussed and complete this theme. This list is clearly not definitive as almost every day I think of more that need to be considered. Suffice to say it's little wonder elite coaches seem to age so quickly as their task is not only done under intense scrutiny, but they have so many aspects to balance in order to achieve optimum results. **CE**

Making the right decisions

Game-based drills and match practice are the best way to develop a player's decision-making. BY TREVOR WILLIAMS

▶ Australian Football has recently undergone great change in the way in which it is played at the top level, due in large part to the introduction of numerous rule changes and the constantly changing nature of coaching tactics.

With flooding, forward pressure, perimeter defending and an increased emphasis on defensive skills, the dynamics of the changing game forces coaches to continually plan and players to be better decision-makers.

Decision-making has become a key focus with more emphasis placed on players developing this skill. Despite this, we must not lose sight of the fact that players must still have, or attain, a basic skill level, and prepare physically to meet the demands of the game. But inherent in the 'preferred player package' is the ability to make good decisions and execute skills under immense pressure. So how do we train our developing footballers to meet the demands of today's game and help them achieve their goal of being the best they can be? We constantly look for those players who appear to have that uncanny ability to get out of

trouble, have extra time to release the footy, evade tight situations, and bob up where the ball is or where it is going. In essence, those players who show footy smarts.

Are they found or are they taught? As a coach I see it as my responsibility, and indeed the responsibility of incumbent coaches at all levels of football development, to provide appropriate game-based training drills and match-simulated training to coach young footballers in the art of reading the play and developing their peripheral awareness to improve decision-making.

As the coach at Peel Thunder, and the colts for seven seasons before that, I have adapted my coaching plans and training styles to better meet the demands placed on the modern footballer. Our coaching department has placed greater emphasis on providing that match-simulated environment through the pre-season and in-season training phases to develop decision-making ability within our emerging talent and development squads. A coaching curriculum, consisting of drills and processes with key decision-making components has been developed for development coaches to implement for player gradations at each entry level—14s, 15s, 16s and colts.

This means we specifically educate and train players to role play match scenarios during training. Players are presented with verbal and visual instructions and a whiteboard is used to show and explain scenarios. Players are then asked to work through situations and provide their thoughts on the how, what, where or why of the situation. This is done with use of a whiteboard and magnets as well as edited game vision.

Players then go into a process where they perform 'the play'. This is generally done in small groups of six to eight players with line coaches. Players are now making decisions in process drills where variables are added and the environment becomes one of experiencing it, dealing with it, discovering limitations and options. Players and coaches spend some time reflecting during this process and experiential phase.

Repeat experiential phase with changing variables: add an extra defender or 'whistle' a turnover, for example, and observe players' responses with their decision-making.

During this phase of training specific game scenarios can be prepared for players such as:

- predicting depth at a front-and-centre contest.
- working the angle to a contest.
- developing an understanding of ball movement patterns related to player, opponent and teammate knowledge.

The drill will now progress from zoned groups of forwards/midfielders/backs to linking midfielders/forwards or midfielders/backs, then progressing to full oval drills with the ball in constant transition and variables changing—as can be expected on game day.

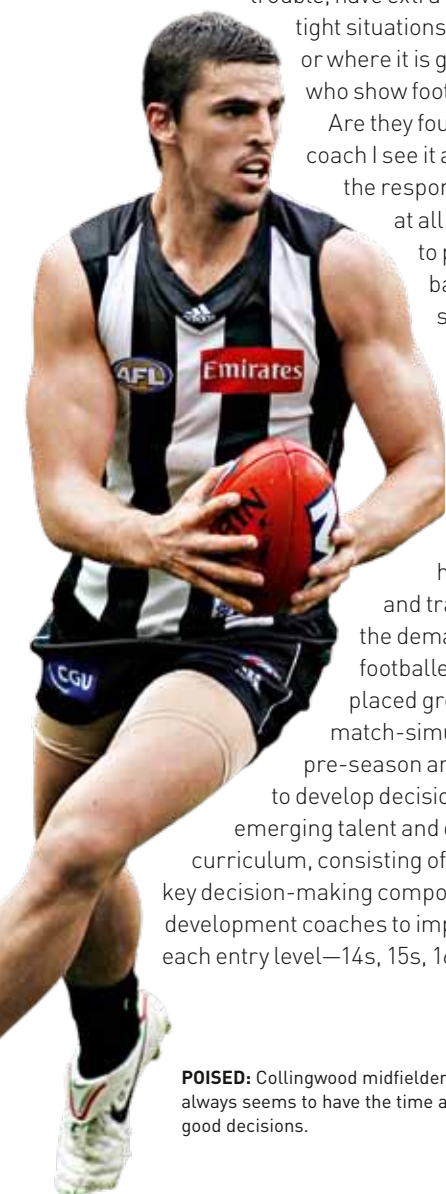
Our club has certainly shifted its training focus to game-sense activities incorporating decision-making rationale to improve player development. In terms of performance, the adage of 'you play how you train', has been replaced by 'we need to train how we wish to play'. **CE**

Trevor Williams is senior coach at Peel Thunder.

This article was written as part of the requirement for AFL High Performance Coach accreditation.

POISED: Collingwood midfielder Scott Pendlebury always seems to have the time and space to make good decisions.

GOOD CHOICES: Richmond's Trent Cotchin constantly displays 'footy smarts' out on the field.



ROOS KICK ON:
North Melbourne's
(L-R) Jack Ziebell,
Michael Firrito, Liam
Anthony, Leigh Adams
and Andrew Swallow
get ready to work
on their kicking.



Individual and small-group kicking activities for match-day (PART 2)

Once a player is a technically sound kick, they should practise the wide variety of kicks needed in a game.

BY AFL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Australian Football players will be faced with match-day situations that will require them to implement a wide variety of kicks during a match. Therefore, once the critical elements of the kicking technique have been developed, players should start practising the many different kicks that they will need to use.

Practising these kicks progressively in situations ranging from easy to more difficult will ensure a player maintains the critical elements. The following are some common kicking scenarios that require a player to adapt.

KICKING TO ADVANTAGE

The aim of 'kicking to advantage' is to provide every opportunity for your teammate to win possession of the ball. Kicking to advantage is not about pinpointing a pass; it is essentially about providing advantage to a teammate who is being defended closely in a marking contest.

When kicking to advantage, the player kicks the ball to the side of the contest their teammate is on. The kick is to be weighted and given some 'hang time', and aimed around three to four metres to the teammate's side of the contest.

Placing the kick this distance from the contest will allow the teammate to hold their ground, protect where the ball will land, push off their opponent at the last moment and move to the ball. If completed effectively, this will give the defender no opportunity to spoil.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 The player starts a comfortable kicking distance away from a pole.
- 2 The player selects one side of the pole to kick the ball.
- 3 The player aims to land the ball around three metres to the selected side of the pole.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To kick the ball to space on the advantage side of a contest.



PRECISION PIE: Heath Shaw regularly kicks to his teammates' advantage.

COACHING EMPHASIS

- Players look at the space where they want to kick the ball, which is different to where players usually look when kicking a football.
- Players visualise the ball landing in the selected space.
- Players focus on the feel of the ball and the use of a firm foot.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- What are the differences when kicking to a teammate compared with kicking to space?
- How did the kick feel when it was completed effectively?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following option can be incorporated:

- Players aim to land the ball in front of the pole by three metres and behind the pole by three metres. Often, when kicking to advantage, a teammate may be caught behind a defender, so a kick just over the contest can be effective.

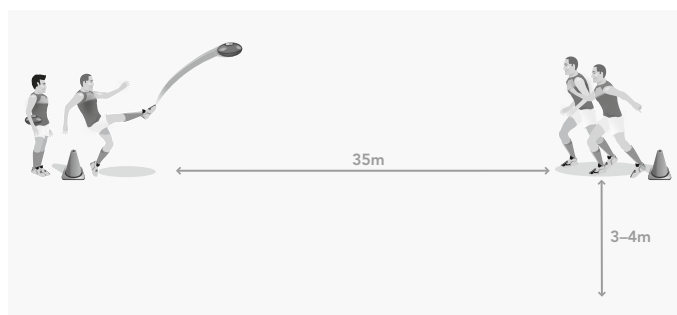
PAIRS OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To kick the ball to space and the advantage side of a contest.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 In groups of four, pair up about 35m apart.
- 2 One player kicks the ball to the other pair. The player aims to kick the ball to the side of the player who has their arm out.
- 3 The kicker should weight the ball so it lands three to four metres from the contesting pair, to allow the marking player to initially hold their position and then push off to mark the ball.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

COACHING EMPHASIS

Players continue to implement the critical elements of kicking, and explore and adapt their technique to 'give the ball more air'.

- Players may find it difficult to kick to space instead of a target. This is part of learning to adapt their kicking to a game situation.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- How did the kick look compared to a kick that is directed straight at a teammate?
- How did the kick feel compared to a kick that is directed straight at a teammate?
- Where did you aim the kick when kicking to a teammate's advantage?
- If the kick was a little wide, how much ground could the receiver make up while the ball was in the air?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Place the kicker under physical or time pressure.
- Kick the ball over a player on the mark.
- Kick the ball in front of or behind the pair of players to create other kicking situations.

KICKING AROUND CORNERS

Kicking around a corner is sometimes used by players who find themselves in high-pressure contested situations. A player's core or trunk (hips and shoulders) may be facing one way, but the player is looking to dispose of the ball quickly to a teammate positioned in a different direction.

When players are trying to kick on an angle like this, the critical elements of the kicking technique at impact—a firm foot, good lower leg acceleration and a controlled ball drop—are still needed.

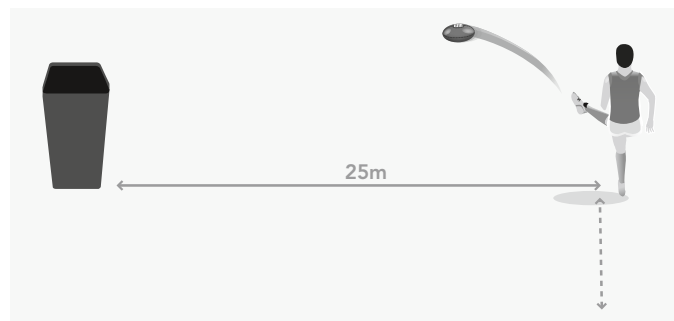
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To experiment with kicking the football in a direction different to which the player is travelling. This is explored over different distances, using different ball drops and trajectories.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 Find a stationary target, a tree, a bin or a large tackle bag. From 25m, practise moving at 90 degrees to the target and then kicking to the target.
- 2 Have 10 kicks and count the number of hits. Players should experiment with different ball drop methods and trajectories from varying distances to find a method that brings the best results for them.



VOLUME OF KICKS – This activity should be gradually introduced and players monitored as these kicks may use muscles in sequences that are new to the kicker.

COACHING EMPHASIS

Players continue to implement the critical elements of kicking, and explore and adapt their technique to hit the target around the corner. »

PIN-POINT:

Hawthorn's Matt Suckling impressed with his accurate and penetrating left foot in 2011.



- Players will find a difference between laying the ball across the boot in a snapping motion and using a modified drop punt requiring the body to be squared up as the kick is executed.
- Playing around with these scenarios will assist players in finding an around-the-corner method which gives them the best results.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- How did the kick look compared to a kick running straight at the target?
- How did the kick feel compared to a kick running straight at the target?
- Which method of ball drop felt best?
- Which ball drop brought the best results?
- What foot position felt best to achieve good contact with the around-the-corner kick? (This is critical to allow the body to square up towards the target nearing impact.)»
- What trajectory was most effective?
- In what situations would you use this kick during a match?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Placing the kicker under physical or time pressure.
- Making the player kick the ball over or around a player on the mark.
- Kicking to a moving teammate at varying angles and distances.

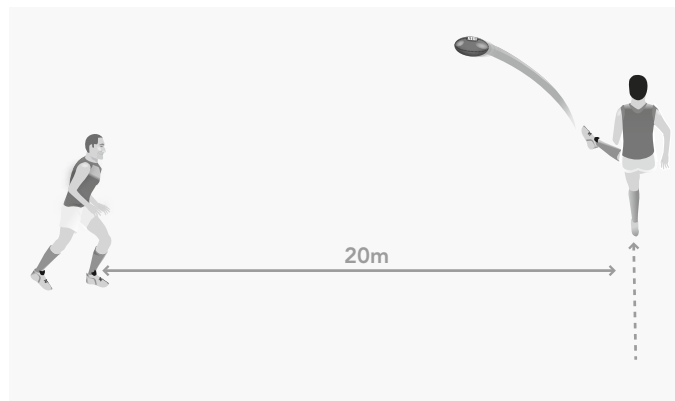
PAIRS OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To experiment kicking the football in a direction which is at an angle to where the kicker is moving. This is explored over different distances, using different ball drops and trajectories.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 In groups of two, three or four, spaced equally apart starting at 20m, each player runs perpendicular to the target and finds a way to bring the ball back to the target.
- 2 Progressions involve intensity and time to deliver, line of movement of the kicker, target player movement and distance.



VOLUME OF KICKS – This should be monitored and gradually increased as these kicks may use muscles in sequences that are new to the kicker.

COACHING EMPHASIS –

- Players continue to implement the critical elements of kicking and explore and adapt their technique to hit the target around the corner.
- Players will find a big difference between laying the ball across the boot in a snapping motion against using a modified drop punt requiring the body to be 'squared up' as the kick is executed. Playing around with these scenarios will assist the player in finding an around-the-corner method which gives the best results for them.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- How did the kick look compared to a kick running straight at the target?
- How did the kick feel compared to a kick running straight at the target?
- Which method of ball drop felt best?
- Which ball drop brought the best results?
- What foot position felt best to achieve good contact with the around-the-corner kick? (This is critical to allow the body to square up towards the target nearing impact.)
- What trajectory was most effective?
- In what situations would you use this kick during a match?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Place the kicker under physical or time pressure.
- Kick the ball over or around a player on the mark.
- Kick to moving teammates at varying angles and distances.

**COMPOSED:**

Essendon veteran Dustin Fletcher is a master at selecting the right target when under pressure.

KICKING OFF ONE STEP

Although kicking off one step is generally not recommended, especially in a static kick situation, sometimes it is necessary or advantageous to dispose of the ball quickly.

When kicking the ball off one step, the player must be able to generate forward momentum quickly. This can be done by leaning forward more than usual and taking a small step.

The player must also swing their leg in an arc to allow the hips to generate greater foot speed. A player will be unable to kick the ball as far off one step, compared with taking a short run up, but must learn to adapt to this situation.

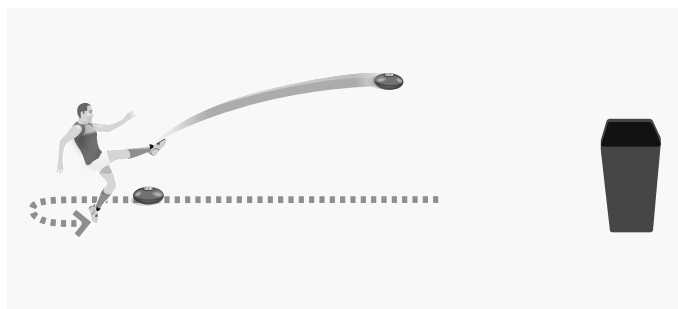
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To kick accurately with reduced time available to perform the kick.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- Player starts 20-25m from a wheelie bin or other target such as a tackle bag.
- Player faces away from the target, with the ball on the ground in front.
- Player picks up the ball, turns and as quickly as possible aims and kicks at the target.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

COACHING EMPHASIS

- Player should immediately aim at the target after turning.
- Player should create some forward momentum as quickly as possible. Although players may not get a chance to be totally balanced, gaining some forward momentum is important.
- Encourage players to 'feel' the ideal power needed for the kick.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- Did you have time to see or visualise the ball in flight in the brief time available?
- Were you able to use the same grip as normal or did you need to adapt?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Move the target without the player actually knowing how far away the target is or what angle it may be on. Players keep their back to the target as they walk away.
- Have another player put pressure on the kicker by starting five metres behind the player and, once the ball is picked up, attempt to tackle the kicker.

HONING SKILLS: Practising the wide variety of kicks needed in a game will give a player an edge.

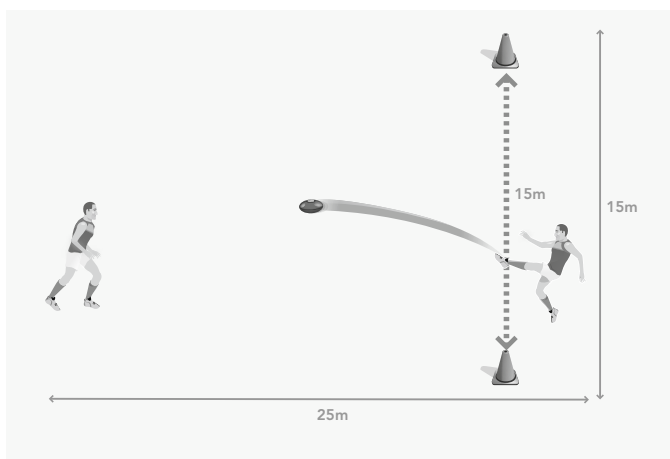
PAIRS OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To kick accurately with reduced time available to perform the kick.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 The kicker runs up and back between two cones, spaced around 10-15m apart.
- 2 The receiver is around 20m away, to the side of the cones.
- 3 On the call of the receiving player or a whistle, the kicker balances and kicks the ball to the receiver as quickly as possible.
- 4 Rotate roles after six to eight repetitions.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

COACHING EMPHASIS

- Players aim to gain as much balance as possible before kicking quickly.
- Players must concentrate on accuracy even under this pressure.
- Players use whichever foot suits weight distribution. For example, when running to the left, the player should kick on their left foot.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- Was it easier to kick on a particular side?
- If defenders were added could you watch them while waiting for the call to kick?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Have the receiving player continually change their position.
- Add a defender against the receiver.
- Add another receiver and a defender. The kicker will have to make a decision on who to kick to while still kicking quickly. »

DRIBBLE KICK

The dribble kick is used to get the ball from one player to another along the ground or when a player is attempting to kick a goal from a narrow angle.

If a player intends the dribble kick to go directly forward, the ball is held vertically, and kicked so the ball hits the ground immediately.

In all dribble kicks, the ball is kicked 'end over end' so it spins forward unlike airborne kicks. Players attempting to dribble a ball 'around corners', or move the ball from right to left or vice versa, must grip the ball similarly to either a banana kick or snap kick.

If a right-footed player wants the ball to run left to right along the ground, they should use the snap kick technique, ensuring the ball hits the ground immediately after it leaves the foot.

If a right-footed player wants the ball to run right to left along the ground, they should use the banana kick technique, again ensuring that the ball hits the ground immediately after the ball leaves the foot.

Dribble kicks provide a great opportunity for players to experiment with different grips, as some grips may suit some players more than others.

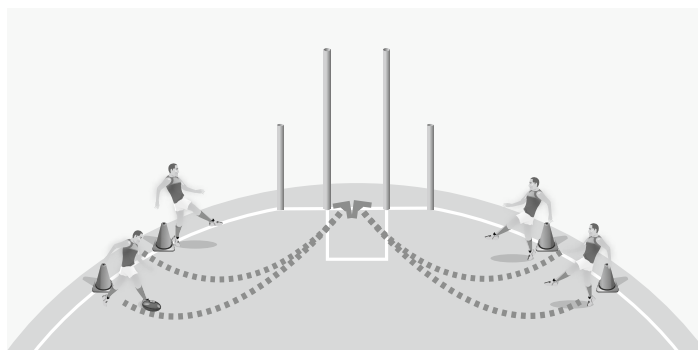
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To dribble the ball along the ground in the desired direction.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- 1 Players position themselves at four markers along the boundary line, no further than 20 metres from the point post.
- 2 The player attempts to dribble the ball through the goals from each marker.
- 3 The player moves to the other side of the goals and repeats the process.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

COACHING EMPHASIS

- The ball should hit the ground immediately after it has left the foot.
- Players should experiment with how hard they need to kick the ball for it to turn. The slower the ball rolls, the further it will turn.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- Where should contact on the ball be made by the foot to achieve the best outcome?
- Does the force of impact change how much the ball will turn?
- What happens as the ball slows down?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Players to use both feet.
- Performing the skill on the run.

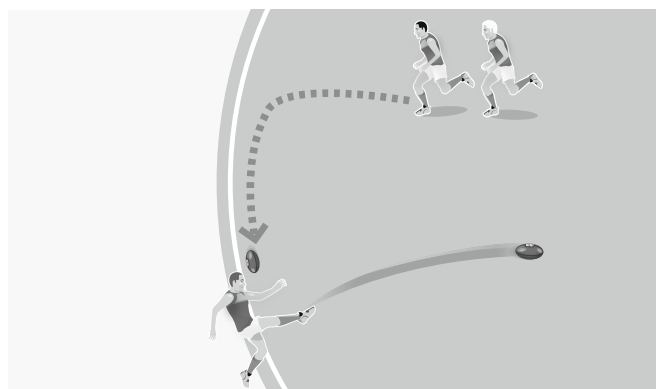
PAIRS OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

KICKING OBJECTIVE

To dribble the ball along the ground in the desired direction.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- In groups of three, one player with the ball runs towards the boundary line at pace with an opponent chasing.
- The player attempts to dribble the ball along the boundary line for as long as possible before it eventually falls out of bounds.
- The third player retrieves the ball and all players rotate positions.



VOLUME OF KICKS – High

COACHING EMPHASIS

- The ball should hit the ground immediately after it has left the foot.
- Players should experiment with kicking the ball hard while keeping it on a slight curve towards the boundary line.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- Where was the best place on the ball to make contact for the ball to travel the furthest distance?
- Did you kick the ball in a way which ensured you would not be penalised for deliberate out of bounds?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

To make the drill more challenging the following options can be incorporated:

- Practise on both sides of the body. **CE**

This article is part of the AFL's Ultimate Kicking Guide.



RISING STAR: Gold Coast's David Swallow is an elite kick after countless hours of practice as a junior.

2011 AFL coaching resources

New AFL online shop

The AFL has produced a number of quality coaching resources to complement our extensive coach education program and to assist coaches in their work. To purchase any resources, please log on to our new online shop: afl.com.au/developmentresources

Umpiring and schools resources

The AFL online shop allows you to access AFL umpiring and AFL schools resources: afl.com.au/developmentresources

Coaching manuals online

AFL coaching manuals are still available for download in PDF format free of charge. To download the PDFs go to the link: <http://aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=370>

The Golden Years

FOREWORD BY LUKE HODGE

Hawthorn's golden era has spanned five decades and included 10 premierships, making it one of the most successful periods in the history of Australian Football. *The Golden Years: Stories from Hawthorn's Greatest Era* tells the story of Hawthorn's golden years, driven by exceptional players and great leaders, including innovative coaches such as Bob McCaskill, Jack Hale, John Kennedy snr, David Parkin, Allan Jeans, Alan Joyce and Alastair Clarkson.

RRP \$65 – www.aflbooks.com



The Coach: The Official AFL Level 1 Coaching Manual



The Coach sets out standards and guidelines that give clear answers to how coaches should conduct their teams and themselves. This is the standard text for AFL Level 1 Senior coaching course. RRP: \$13.75 (GST incl.)

Skills of Australian Football



Every week over the football season we marvel at how today's AFL stars have become so proficient in the execution of their skills. This book analyses the skills of the game as the stars show and explain how it's done.

RRP: \$22 (GST incl.)

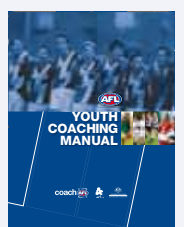
Style of Play [DVD]



Former Richmond and Perth premiership player and long-time West Coast Eagles assistant coach Robert Wiley presents a comprehensive video analysis of style of play in modern football, including forward entries, stoppages, defensive strategies, kick-ins and zones, switches and style of play.

RRP: \$15 (GST incl.)

AFL Youth Coaching Manual



This is a must-have resource for any coach of footballers in the 13-17 age group. The manual provides teaching information for the main skills and tactics of the game and advises coaches on important social and interpersonal skills. RRP: \$27.50 (GST incl.)

A Season of Achievement



All footballers start their journey in community clubs. Steven Ball has written about part of that journey, through his experiences coaching Moonee Valley under-12s over a season and provides valuable lessons.

RRP: \$15 (GST incl.)

Drills & Skills



In *Drills & Skills in Australian Football*, David Wheaden, who has more than two decades' experience as an assistant coach at AFL clubs, presents a comprehensive selection of drills and practices that relate to the key aspects of the modern game. The

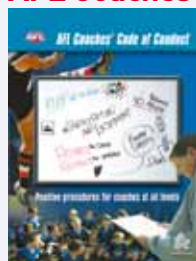
book contains 176 specific drills, which range from simple to complex practices that will challenge elite players, and which are categorised into different areas of the game. RRP: \$30 (GST incl.)

AFL Junior Coaching Manual



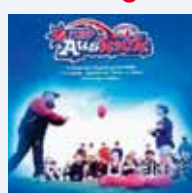
The *AFL Junior Coaching Manual* is for coaches, coordinators, participants and parents in the NAB AFL Auskick Program. It is an essential text for all coaches working with children of primary-school age. RRP: \$27.50 (GST incl.)

AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct



This outlines the accepted behaviour of coaches in regard to safety, legal and behavioural aspects of football. By accepting this code, coaches are displaying a commitment to support minimum standards of good coaching. FREE

AFL Auskick Interactive Coaching CD ROM



This is an ideal teaching tool for coaches, teachers and parents of primary school children. It provides a range of activities and skill games for younger children. RRP: \$5.50 (GST incl.)

Game Day Coaching [DVD]



West Coast Eagles General Manager of Football Operations and former Melbourne coach Neale Daniher presents the key areas of effective game-day coaching, including game-plan, weekly preparation, pre-game, coaching box protocols, the breaks and post-game.

RRP: \$10 (GST incl.)

Laws of Australian Football [DVD]



The Laws of Australian Football allow for the game to be played in a safe and fun environment. In keeping with the ever-changing nature of the game, this DVD outlines some of the

latest rule interpretations. This resource is used to coach umpires and educate AFL clubs.

RRP: \$5.50 (GST incl.)

CoachingEdge

