

# CoachingEdge

Incorporating Coaching Update | VOLUME 24, No 1 June 2010

Shane O'Bree  
PLAYING AS  
A MIDFIELD  
SWEEPER



DEVELOPING  
GAME-SMART  
PLAYERS

## Community Football Coach

Chris Johnson's new coaching role in  
the Essendon District Football League



# CoachingEdge

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**COVER:** Three-time Brisbane Lions premiership player and former assistant coach Chris Johnson has returned to grassroots football this year as playing coach of Avondale Heights in the Essendon District Football League.

**RIGHT:** Veteran Collingwood midfielder Shane O'Bree dissects an on-field role that has become vital in modern football, the midfield sweeper, on pages 14-15.

## A Coaching Edge for coaches at all levels

**▶** In this edition of *Coaching Edge* there is a range of articles to interest coaches at all levels. Collingwood's Shane O'Bree delivers his thoughts on how to play the midfield sweeper position, and former Essendon high performance manager John Quinn covers the often-neglected area of training during the middle of the season.

As the game continues to expand there is a need to understand how best to tap into the cultures that have had little or no history in Australian Football. AFL multicultural project coordinator Nick Hatzoglou provides advice on how to coach people from multicultural backgrounds.

An excerpt from the upcoming *AFL Ultimate Kicking Guide* explains the importance of achieving the correct impact position in kicking. It also highlights critical learning points coaches should focus on when teaching players to kick, including technique, sensory feedback and emulating good role models. Additionally, we explore why players often kick much more accurately at training than they do in games.

While teaching the game's skills is very important in developing players, the ability to execute these skills

in a 'smart' manner is critical to on-field success, North Melbourne high performance manager Ray Breed explains.

AFL conditioning and talent database manager James Veale reports on a Victoria University research project exploring the characteristics of elite junior players in AFL Academies.

In our regular features, our man from Canada, Chris Donahoe, continues to reflect on his football journey, 'From the Ivory Tower and Beyond' looks back on swimmer Daniel Kowalski's remarkable career, 'Media Watch' dissects interviews with AFL coaches and identifies some useful lessons for coaches at all levels, and in 'Mind Games' the mental skills required to meet the unique challenges of football are examined.

Hopefully, you enjoy this edition of *Coaching Edge* and perhaps more importantly can include some of the ideas in your own coaching – and get the results you are after!

**Ken Davis**  
Editor

### Coaching Edge

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# Media Watch

Experienced journalists are often able to tap into the psyche of coaches and in this regular section **Ken Davis** looks at some recent in-depth features on coaches and what they reveal.

## “Lifestyle and athletic performance”

**Brad Scott (North Melbourne)**  
**Michael Gleeson, *The Age*, January 2, 2010**

Scott says: “I don’t expect our players to be absolute cleanskins and never make a mistake because I don’t think it is sustainable. What I won’t tolerate is that you can’t take time off from being an elite athlete... there are certain non-negotiables about being an elite athlete and if you don’t like those non-negotiables then that is fine, but don’t be an elite athlete.”

**Editor’s note:** I love this concept. Traditionally, players have often been ‘elite athletes’ only under the tutelage of their coaches and trainers. Much of the benefits of an intense training session are lost if matched with a poor diet, excess alcohol consumption and irregular sleeping patterns.

## “Playing style”

Gleeson asks Scott about playing style, suggesting his coaching experiences as a player (Leigh Matthews) and as an assistant coach (Mick Malthouse) will influence him to become a defensive coach. Scott says defence has become linked to ‘ugly’ football, but makes the point Hawthorn and St Kilda have defensive mindsets, but have both played entertaining football in the past two seasons. Scott also says, “Personnel dictates the way you play.”

**Editor’s note:** Football is a game of offence and defence. It is rare for a side to succeed consistently without a healthy balance of both. Two years ago, Essendon adopted a frenzied ‘run and attack’ game-plan, but a lack of defence hurt them on many occasions. Conversely, sides intent on defence only come unstuck against teams with a balance of offensive threats and sound defence.

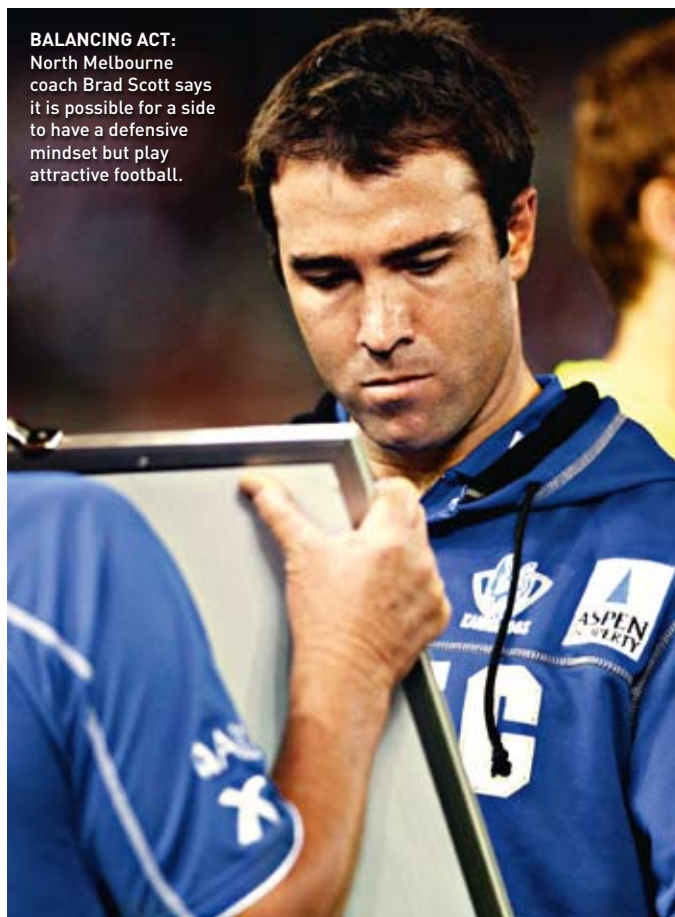
Scott’s last comment about personnel dictating the way you play is logical but often overlooked. It was OK for North Melbourne in the 1990s to kick long to centre half-forward because it had Wayne Carey who won more marking contests than he lost. But not all sides have a forward of that ilk. The most important aspect of coaching is to match a style of play to the personnel at your disposal. The clever coach utilises the strengths of their team and minimises the impact of its weaknesses.

## “Decision-making”

**Rodney Eade (Western Bulldogs)**  
**Rohan Connolly, *4Quarters*, September/October 2008**

Eade says football is a dynamic game, not like gridiron or rugby, where players and coaches can stop and regroup, so coaches need to prepare various game scenarios for players, teaching them about the decisions they should make in those situations. By setting these parameters, a coach can help players make the right decisions in games, Eade says.

**BALANCING ACT:**  
 North Melbourne coach Brad Scott says it is possible for a side to have a defensive mindset but play attractive football.



**Editor’s note:** Eade’s comments suggest it is now more relevant for coaches to try to replicate game situations at training so players’ decision-making can be tested under the pressure of competition.

## “Attack or defend”

Eade believes the focus of coaches has changed from trying not to lose to trying to win.

**Editor’s note:** Many sides now seem to be playing with more initiative and positive intent. However, every player must possess strong defensive skills to pressurise opponents whenever they gain possession. It is now a game of rapid transition from attack to defence, with the use of the interchange enabling players to run very hard for short bursts and then have a break on the bench.

## “Relaxing before the big game”

**Mark Thompson (Geelong coach)**  
**Mark Robinson, *Herald Sun*, October 13, 2009**

In reflecting on Geelong’s premiership in 2009, it was apparent Thompson had had to work hard to relax prior to last year’s Grand Final because of all the commitments he had as coach in the week leading up to the game.

Thompson said, “I had a massive week media wise. I tried to keep it controlled but it was a massive week. I had 12 hours sleep the night before the Grand Final. I went to bed at 9pm and was exhausted. I woke up as fresh as a daisy. I was driven to the ground so I just sat in the back with my iPod, doing my notes for the match board ... pretty relaxed.”

**Editor’s note:** Thompson’s observations reiterate the importance of having a good sleep the night before the game. Without a good night’s sleep, Thompson would probably not have been in a great mental state to manage his complex match-day role. **CE**

# From the ivory tower and beyond

In his regular search for inspiration from outside football, **Ken Davis** looks at swimmer Daniel Kowalski (pictured right) and his career, as well as how you can teach kids through match practice.



## No prize for second?

I had the pleasure of attending a presentation by Australian swimming champion Daniel Kowalski recently. If you get a chance to hear the ups and downs of Daniel's journey to becoming an elite swimmer, you should grab it. He is a very humble man, and very honest and forthright about the challenges he faced.

During his speech, Daniel told of how as a 13-year-old he was ranked fourth last out of a group of 36. At that time no coach would have identified him as a future international performer, but less than three years later he had a world ranking of six.

Daniel was riddled by injury and poor health throughout his career, but came back time and time again to produce world-class performances.

Sometimes he did not get the recognition he deserved.

After qualifying ahead of Kieren Perkins for the 1500m at the 1996 Olympics, he attended a media conference with Perkins but was not asked a single question.

Daniel said it was a hard slog to get to those Atlanta Olympics. His meet started with the 200 metres and he had no sleep the night before. His warm-up before that race was poor; he felt like he had "no hands and no feet". Fifth at the 150m mark, he flew home for third. "It was a great feeling," he recalled.

Daniel was not as happy with his third-place finish in the 400m, but he went into his main event, the 1500m, as the favourite. 'You can win it', he kept telling himself, but he didn't believe it. His warm-up was again "pathetic". He felt too much expectation and was scared of failure. He didn't want to be swimming. At the 300m mark he knew he wasn't going to win. He said he "was so far off the zone and felt every turn". He chased down British swimmer Graeme Smith in the final few metres to grab the silver medal behind Perkins, who won from lane eight. At the finish, he "would rather not have been there".

After that experience, Daniel struggled in all areas of his life and it wasn't until he sought counsel from a sport psychologist that he started to get his life back on track and put his swimming career into perspective. He then went to university and approached his sport differently.

Daniel is now working at the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) in athlete welfare.

Daniel's story outlines how obsessed Australians are with winning.

Winners are glorified but runners-up are made to feel like failures. In the Atlanta 1500m, Daniel finished second in the world ... second in the world!

Do enough people stop and think about how good that is? It has been a beef of mine that second placegetters are inevitably tagged 'chokers' for falling at the last hurdle. It is natural for a sportsperson to be disappointed at finishing second, particularly if they were favoured to win. But it is an indictment on sport today that second placegetters are made to feel like failures. As I said to Daniel, he is a champion and to finish second in the world in a 1500m swim is an extraordinary performance and one he should be proud of.

## Build children's skills through play

Training in sporting teams has undergone significant change in the past 50 years. Initially, the thought was playing the game was the best preparation, with match practice a familiar sight at most football clubs.

In the past 20 years, there has been a move away from match practice because each player's level of involvement fluctuates and there is a significant risk of injury. Additionally, coaches have devised drills that practice specific match situations requiring attention.

Interestingly, in children's sport, there has been an increasing emphasis on learning skills in game situations. This does not have to be a full-size game but a modified one in which players have to execute the skills under game-like pressure.

Massey University's **Dennis Slade** in 'Volunteer Coaches Encouraged to Build Children's Skills through Play' believes by placing more emphasis on the game itself, children not only have more fun, but are able to develop their skills through play.

Slade talks about watching a netball practice drill in which two lines of players are standing still, passing the ball to each other and says, "It looks like they've got that mastered, but it isn't netball and you won't know if they can pass in netball until you put them into a game situation."

Employing these strategies when coaching juniors would mean spending a short time on practicing skills without pressure and then introducing them into game situations as quickly as possible. **ce**

# Mind games

Mental skills such as visualisation and positive reinforcement can help footballers perform under the fiercest of pressure, **Ken Davis** explains.

▶ It has become increasingly apparent the mind can play a significant part in the outcome of football matches. Cast your mind back to last year's epic AFL Grand Final and the goals missed by St Kilda's Adam Schneider and Stephen Milne and you can see pressure often plays havoc with skills.

Each sport requires players to develop unique mental skills to perform at the highest level. Footballers and coaches can learn a lot from watching other sports' participants in action. At the recent Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, all viewers could see the superb mental focus of the aerial skiers before they commenced their runs. The ability of these athletes to visualise their performance before competing is outstanding and it is still an area neglected in football.

Watching Karrie Webb shoot a final-round 61 to win this year's Australian Masters, you could see how composed and focused you need to be throughout a contest to perform at your best. Even though she was comfortably in the lead she still wanted to make birdies on every hole but was smart enough to avoid trouble. When she found a fairway bunker on one hole, rather than worry about the possibility of making a bogey she focused on the job at hand – and made birdie. Taking one step at a time, not dwelling on past mistakes and not getting too far ahead of yourself are common requirements for success in most sports.

Watching a tennis match between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, one is impressed by the consistent ability of both players to make balanced, powerful strokes after four hours of intense competition. The ability to maintain form while becoming increasingly fatigued is a wonderful asset to have and requires both physical and mental fitness.

While we can learn from other sports, there is no doubt football is a unique game that requires unique mental skills. These skills include:

- ▶ **The ability to confront the inevitable physical contact in football represents perhaps the game's toughest mental challenge.** Maintaining your focus on the ball when running back to contest a mark, knowing a wall of players is approaching at speed from the opposite direction, requires enormous courage. Running to pick up a ball in a congested area with potential heavy knocks awaiting from all directions also demands courage. When working with players who may lack a little courage it is useful to remind them there are probably only three or four times a game when they will be under severe physical threat. If they can learn to brace themselves and commit their bodies for those moments, then their courage is less likely to be questioned. Visualisation can help to prepare players for these tests.
- ▶ **Players on the last line of defence need to be resilient. Almost every possession gained by an opponent can result in a shot at goal.** Many players can lose confidence when their opponent scores a number of quick

goals, despite the fact they've beaten them in 80 per cent of contests. A defender needs to constantly remind themselves how they have fared in individual contests with their opponent. By all means, reflect on times when scoring opportunities occur and modify your approach if necessary, but don't lose confidence in your ability to win the next contest. You can't control whether an opponent kicks accurately or not, nor can you control the delivery they receive. Why then would you focus on the number of goals kicked against you as the major indicator of your performance on the day?

- ▶ **Players need to be prepared to play in a multitude of roles and positions, and cope with spending time on the bench.**

Viewing bench time as an opportunity to reflect, evaluate and refocus is productive. Seeing a move to another position as a challenge, rather than a sign the coach may not think you are playing very well, is a useful strategy. In preparation for each game an adaptable player will imagine themselves playing in a number of positions and against various opponents. That way they are seldom surprised by a move to a new position.

- ▶ **There is no doubt the 21st century footballer needs to have both an attacking and defensive mindset.** Gone are the days when forwards could linger on the ground after a marking contest and amble back to the goal-square. I like to use the example of basketball to illustrate how quickly you can change from attack to defence. Basketballers can thrill the crowds with a slam dunk, but as soon as they hit the ground their mind is on getting into the best defensive position. There is no time to wave to the crowd or savour the moment. If every footballer in a team could transfer from offence to defence that quickly no coach could complain. This mindset, though, is difficult to ingrain and needs to be drilled at practice and in imagery work prior to a game.

The above examples outline just some of the mental skills required in football. They are by no means innovative thoughts, however, many players fall down occasionally because they don't prepare themselves mentally for the variety of situations that can occur in a game. A mindset based on the above principles does not guarantee success but can give you the best chance of success. **CE**

**AFFECTED BY NERVES:**  
St Kilda's Stephen Milne missed goals he would normally have converted in last year's Grand Final.



# Mid-season training is not just about fitness

**IN-SEASON MAINTENANCE:** During the season, players like Western Bulldogs Matthew Boyd (centre) and Ryan Griffen get their main workout in games, with recovery a key component of their mid-week training.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in coaching is to develop a training program that simultaneously meets the physical and technical (tactical) objectives of both the team and its individual players. An initial overview of the season includes various training phases, which include pre-season preparation, specific preparation, lead-in games, in-season games (including finals) and an off-season break.

The division of the season into these different phases is termed periodisation. Other considerations in constructing the program would include incorporating appropriate breaks for byes, travel and shortened weeks.

When working in a team environment such as football, the coach needs to be mindful of the capacity of each individual in the team. Younger footballers offer distinct challenges for the coach and their attempts to plan a training program. This is due, in part, to other demands and pressures such as school. You should also remember many young team members also participate in other sports, so are involved in training and competition away from football. The physical demands on teenagers as they grow and develop should also not be underestimated.

In this article, we are going to look at training for Australian Football in the middle of the season.

All of your side's pre-season preparation has been done and it has completed half of the season, leaving you with about 10 weeks of football to go before the finals begin. Regardless of how your team is performing and where it is placed on the ladder, you, as the coach, need to ask some questions. One of these is how well the individuals in the team are handling the training and competitions they are involved in.

So how do you know if individual team members are coping with the work being given to them? Once the season is underway, how do you maintain a set level of performance? Because that is the basis of in-season training and your program needs to adapt to the abilities and performance level of each player.

The first fitness consideration is whether the changes in a player's performance relate to fitness, fatigue or development.

## Fitness

If a player appears not to be coping with a training load, is it because they are not fit enough? Possibly. If this is the case, you need to look at the initial training done in preparation and revise that in future seasons. But, for now, there is no shortcut to increasing fitness mid-season. It is a systematic and consistent application of training that brings results and, ultimately, physical changes in an athlete.

Once your side reaches the middle of the season, training must be structured to ensure fatigue does not affect player performance.

BY JOHN QUINN

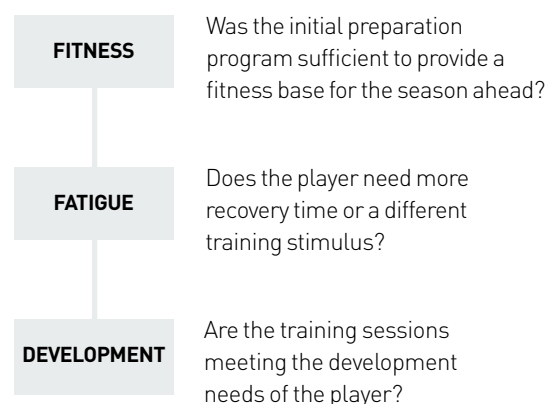


## Fatigue

A drop-off in performance may not be a sign of poor fitness levels but one that the player is fatigued and simply needs more recovery time or a different training stimulus. Look to include different sessions now and then and don't be afraid to give players an easier night at training. Remember once the season gets under way, the key session for the week is actually the game – not the coach's Tuesday training run at the local park.

## Development

If you are working with younger players, is a performance drop-off, or an apparent inability to adapt to training, a possible reflection of an inappropriate program? It is not uncommon to see young players in any sport attempting to do training designed for senior athletes. If your players are not coping with training, it may be the prescribed sessions are not meeting their personal development needs. If you are the coach of younger players, be sure what your role is. If it is focused on development – skill, physical, personal – then so be it. If you accept skill is the most important aspect of football, this should be used as a key indicator of the effectiveness of your training program. If, for example, by mid-season your players are so fatigued from the training and playing loads they cannot perform skills at their maximum level, then you, as coach, must look at the overall training program that has been devised.



There are several ways to monitor the effectiveness of a program. These include performance outcomes (games won/possessions); field tests (speed, strength and endurance); and consistency of performance (from game to game and within a game). However, when monitoring training and a player's ability to cope with the weekly demands of the game, you should look at the following formula:

$$\text{FITNESS} - \text{FATIGUE} = \text{PERFORMANCE}$$

Fitness minus fatigue represents the overall training load for each individual. When you consider the individual characteristics of the player (age, training background, level) and apply a training program of volume and intensity, the effectiveness of your program will be largely determined by the above performance equation.

## ‘THERE IS NO SHORTCUT TO INCREASING FITNESS MID-SEASON. IT IS A SYSTEMATIC AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF TRAINING THAT BRINGS RESULTS AND, ULTIMATELY, PHYSICAL CHANGES IN AN ATHLETE?’

John Quinn

Training loads have two components – internal and external. The external training load is what was actually done in a session. This can be measured by distance, GPS units and the like. The internal training load relates to how an individual responded to a session. This includes measures like heart-rate, blood-lactate levels and oxygen consumption, along with measures such as the Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE). Other tools that measure internal training load include questionnaires such as RESTQ (Recovery-Stress Questionnaire for Athletes) and DALDA (Daily Analysis of Life Demands for Athletes). The RPE measure along with RESTQ and DALDA offer perhaps the most practical approach to assessing internal training loads.

Although the program will be initially defined by what training needs to be done, the ultimate success of the program will be determined by how each individual in the team responds to that training. To this end, the focus during the season should be on internal training loads, not external training loads.

## Rate of Perceived Exertion

Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) provides a practical approach to measuring training loads and the impact of training sessions and games on individuals. Approximately 30 minutes post-session each player is asked to give a rating based on Borg's Scale from 1-10 to describe how difficult they found a session.

### BORG'S SCALE

Rating	Description
0	Rest
1	Very, very easy
2	Easy
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat hard
5	Hard
6	
7	Very Hard
8	
9	
10	Maximal

Then simply multiply the individual's RPE with the duration of the session. For example, if a training session went for 80 minutes (including the warm-up and warm-down) and an individual rated the session a RPE of six, then the overall score for the session (for that individual) would be 480 (6 x 80).

<b>SESSION DURATION</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>SESSION LOAD</b>
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In isolation, this figure may not mean much. However, in comparison with the rest of the team and looked at cumulatively over time, the RPE load figure may be significant. In the AFL, a RPE training load of more than 2000 units a week is associated with poorer performance.

Evidence has shown too high a load during the season reduces a player's running performance in subsequent matches. This is most likely due to factors such as muscle damage, inflammation and carbohydrate restoration. This is also a very good reason to avoid hard training sessions in the 48-hour period after games. Punishment sessions after losses only exacerbate a team's problems if the key factor causing poor form is fatigue.

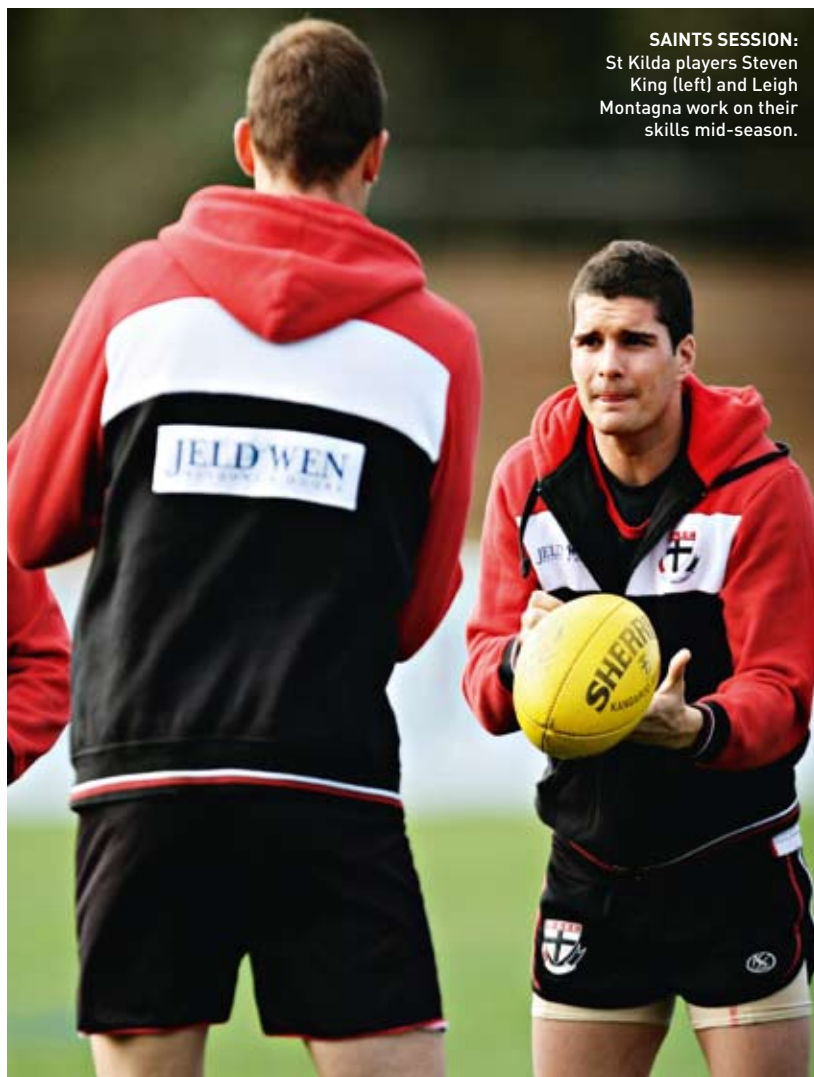
To enhance player monitoring during the season, the use of RESTQ (monthly) and DALDA (daily) questionnaires is highly recommended. Copies of these can be found at [quinnelitesports.com.au](http://quinnelitesports.com.au). Questionnaires can highlight issues affecting players outside football, so can be useful in establishing a more complete picture.

Finally, open and regular communication with the players from both a team and individual perspective will provide an excellent source of information as to whether they are suffering fatigue during the season. If this is the case, the solution may be as simple as reducing a session's load, changing its venue, altering its tempo, or even giving the players the night off.

At the start of the season, it is common to set both individual and team goals. These can also be broken down to positional goals or line goals. At the halfway mark of the season, these goals usually reflect a desire to maintain a high level of fitness, continue to develop technical and tactical ability, minimise injury and injury risks, and avoid disruptive conditions such as cold and flu. While the pursuit of technical and tactical goals may not be assisted by using systems such as RPE, many goals for the season can be monitored by how each individual in the team is coping. This method also highlights the real need to factor team and individual recovery into and between sessions.

## Summary

Team performance over the course of a season is determined by a number of factors. Perhaps the most significant is a player's ability to back up week in, week out.



**SAINTS SESSION:**  
St Kilda players Steven King (left) and Leigh Montagna work on their skills mid-season.

As the grind of the season begins to take effect, it is imperative the coach is aware of how well each player is coping with the demands of training and games.

It is, therefore, recommended that the coach implement the following:

- RPE measures
- DALDA
- RESTQ
- Communication.

These provide simple measures that can enhance a player's overall performance. They can also help maintain focus on in-season goals, maintain fitness levels throughout the year, minimise injury and injury risk and potentially avoid disruptive conditions such as cold and flu. They are great communication tools that may make the difference between a winning finish to the season or a gradual performance decline. It's as simple as asking the question, 'How are you coping' and, perhaps more importantly, listening to and acting upon that answer.

*John Quinn is High Performance Coach at Olympic Park Sports Medicine Centre. He runs his own injury rehabilitation, athlete coaching and sports consulting company. Previously he was head fitness coach and high performance manager at Essendon Football Club from 1999-2008, and was a team coach for the Australian athletics team at the Sydney Olympic Games. **CE***

**OPEN AND REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PLAYERS FROM BOTH A TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE WILL PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF INFORMATION AS TO WHETHER THEY ARE SUFFERING FATIGUE DURING THE SEASON**



# The community club coach

Community football senior coaches who embrace their club in its entirety will reap the rewards. BY LUKE RAYNER

▶ Previous research suggests coaches are the most influential people at club level in community football and there is no doubt in my mind this is the case. The community coach has many areas of influence including, but not limited to, club culture, values, player/coach/parent conduct, game style, the club's medical team, social environment, processes and procedures.

Given this, I believe clubs need to ensure their senior coach is suited to taking on the roles and responsibilities of being a club coach, and can control quality programs throughout the junior and senior levels of the club.

Good coaching helps to create the best learning environment, while also maximising the motivation and enjoyment of all players. The senior coach, who is likely to be the best credentialed coach at the club, needs to put time into developing all of the club's coaches, providing education, resources and a support network, which will help establish a one-club approach.

I acknowledge many community coaches are already time poor and may be thinking these things are unachievable or just further burdens in an already busy role. However, with thorough planning and creative use of resources, and by engaging fellow coaches and relying on the help of a driven junior coordinator, it can be achieved quite easily.

If you can see the outcomes you want to achieve and use these as motivation, this will drive the process. Think of having one united club, shared core values, game-style principles that are implemented on a staged basis through all age groups with similar messages constantly reinforced, coaches coaching to a playbook of consistent drills and a code of conduct suitable to all ages. This will help improve the players' development, knowledge of our game, transition from age group to age group and love for their club.

Since joining the Torquay Tigers Football Club last season with a vision to be a club coach, we have been able to introduce the following strategies and initiatives that have started our journey to becoming one club with amazing coaches, resources and support:

→ Tigers Way Handbook – a comprehensive coaching guide on club values, game-plan principles, line behaviors, team objectives, drills and skills, game sense and full-ground activities. A living document that is updated regularly with input from coaches at all levels.



- Three club coaching seminars in 2009 with more planned for 2010. All coaches from our 16 junior teams and three senior teams attend these nights. I facilitate open discussion on Tigers Way, relevant topics and issues that may have arisen, and encourage the sharing of ideas and support among the coaches.
- A minimum two training visits by our senior players to all junior teams. They either take training or participate with the kids. This helps to develop club links, provides variety for the coaches and encourages the kids to come and watch senior football and develop a love for their club.

These are some of the initiatives a club coach can undertake without too much effort. While in its infancy our program is already seeing:

- Improved synergy between our junior and senior ranks.
- Improved player transition between age groups.
- Improved training methods.
- Better knowledge of our game style.
- Greater enthusiasm among coaches due to the support programs.
- The engagement and motivation of players due to our new strong game-sense focus.

Investing in your coaches at all levels means you are investing in your club as a whole and the environment you are providing for participants. For those that embrace the role of club coach I assure you it will be one of your most satisfying coaching achievements.

*Luke Rayner is club coach and senior coach at Torquay Tigers Football Club and is an accredited AFL High Performance Coach. This article was written as part of the requirements for the AFL High Performance Coach Accreditation Course.*

**COMMUNITY FOCUS:** With some planning and effort, a senior community coach can create a club unified in purpose, game plan and training methods.

**‘THE SENIOR COACH NEEDS TO PUT TIME INTO DEVELOPING ALL OF THE CLUB’S COACHES WHICH WILL HELP ESTABLISH A ONE-CLUB APPROACH’**

# Coaching to include multicultural players

There is a lot a coach can do to integrate people from diverse cultural backgrounds with football and their communities. BY **NICK HATZOGLU**

With the profile of Australian Football increasing in migrant and refugee communities over the past five years and the genesis of the AFL Multicultural Program, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are becoming more enthusiastic about football.

As important figures in the game, coaches are encouraged to play a significant role in enhancing football environments so they are inclusive to all members of the community. As a coach, you already have excellent skills in working with all groups, so I encourage you to use your knowledge and experience when working with this target group.

## The benefits of Australian Football

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds participate in football for the same reasons mainstream children do. To obtain physical, social and emotional benefits that help in their growth and development. In addition, football can make it easier for young people and their families to resettle in Australia, especially given its unique ability to integrate new arrivals into Australian culture.

## When communicating with young people from CaLD backgrounds

- Remember communication is more than just talking. While young people from CaLD backgrounds may not be proficient in English, there are many other ways to communicate a positive experience.
- Help familiarise them with football terms, equipment and rules by demonstrating or practising before the session.
- Common sporting terms may be unfamiliar to young people who don't speak English as their first language. Throughout the session try and keep your language as simple as possible and be prepared to explain or clarify.

## Before the session

- Identify the group leaders or youth workers. Find out about the group's level of understanding English. Use lots of visual aids and demonstrations.
- If you have time it's a good idea to write down key words and concepts you will be using during your session. If you think a word may not be understood, use an alternative word or description instead.
- Migrant or refugee young people, especially boys, have spent a lot of time playing other sports. However, while they may have some of the skills they may be unfamiliar with all the game's rules.
- They may also not understand the role of the umpire, as this might be the first time they have played in a structured setting.



**JOINING IN:** Many youngsters from multicultural backgrounds enjoy Australian Football but can need assistance to understand drills and the rules.

- While it's OK to be flexible, try not to modify the rules too much. Young people from CaLD backgrounds often don't want special treatment and prefer to participate like everyone else.
- Think about the group sizes you work with and be mindful that you may need to reduce the size when working with CaLD young people or get someone to help you.

## During the session

- If young people are talking when you are demonstrating or explaining, it might be because they are translating for someone else. This is a good time to try some visual demonstrations.
- Sometimes even the best-planned session doesn't work. Use your knowledge and experience to assess and change something that is not working.
- Speak clearly and use words and language that is simple and easy for young people to understand. Try not to 'dumb down' your language too much. Just be yourself and young people will respond.
- Some young CaLD people may feel uncomfortable about being quizzed about their understanding of rules and concepts.
- In some cultures, women are required to dress conservatively. Try and remember to schedule in extra drink breaks to combat heat and dehydration caused by heavy clothing and attire.
- Try and make your sessions gender specific. This will allow greater participation of girls in football activities.

## Post session

- Ask the group leaders, workers or teachers how they felt the session went or if they have any suggestions.
- Gauge feedback from the participants, both during and after the session.

## Terms that may confuse CaLD children

Word	Alternative Term
Register	Write down your name and address
Hydrate	Drink lots of water
Injuries	If you hurt yourself
Have a go	Try

## Can you think of other terms that are specific to football?

Terms like half, quarter, sun smart, warm-up and cool-down may also require explanation, while the use of ice packs may need to be demonstrated.

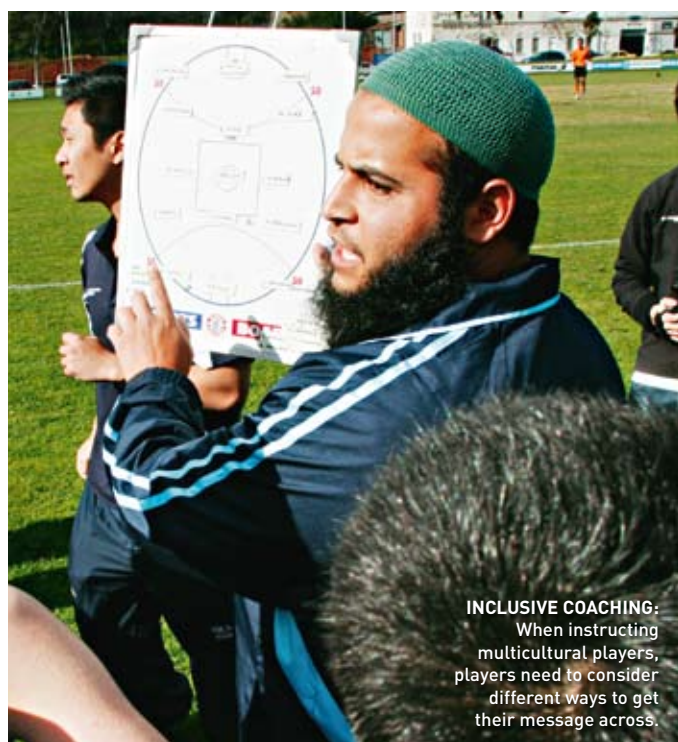
## Some tips to remember:

- Make it visual.
- Be patient.
- Enjoy yourself.
- Use simple language.
- Make it fun.
- Ask them questions.
- Understand their needs.
- Be flexible.

## Barriers facing CaLD young people

Young people today face many challenges and responsibilities, such as:

- A lack of time due to school commitments.
- Family commitments.
- Peer pressure.
- Body image.
- Financial difficulties.



**INCLUSIVE COACHING:**  
When instructing multicultural players, players need to consider different ways to get their message across.

These barriers can hinder many young people's participation in sport. Migrant and refugee young people face additional barriers that can make access to sport and recreation even more difficult.

These can include:

- Unfamiliarity with the structure of sporting clubs and associations.
- Language barriers.
- Lack of priority given to sport by parents.
- Lack of transport.
- Fear of racism or discrimination.
- Cost.

Research has identified that while many young people from refugee backgrounds have participated in sport in their own countries, it has often been in an unstructured setting. A structured session may be unfamiliar to them and often they will be eager to begin playing before you have introduced yourself or explained the session.

You will encounter different levels of confidence and knowledge. If possible talk to the group before the session in order to assess its competency level. Engage the participants in conversation about what sports they have played before or how much they know about the specific activity. This will give you an indication about their skills and level of English.

Refugees have often had traumatic and difficult experiences before arriving in Australia. As with any group, patience and understanding are essential so they can have a positive experience.

## Frequently asked questions

### Do we need an interpreter?

There are many ways to communicate other than language. Additionally, some CaLD children will have English skills as they may have spent time in other English speaking countries.

### Do we need to translate material?

Translated material would be helpful for parents but translations can be expensive. Just be prepared to give verbal instructions and explanations if necessary; community leaders may also be able to help.

### Is it dangerous for women to wear the hijab (head scarf) when playing?

If it's a non-contact game then this may not be an issue, however, if you are concerned ask the young women to adjust their headscarf and tie them without pins, as these can be dangerous during games. If it's an all-female environment the young women may choose to remove them, but enforcing a no-headscarf rule will stop them from participating.

## Essential contacts

### AFL Multicultural Program

Nick Hatzoglou  
(03) 9643 1928  
Nick.hatzoglou@dafl.com.au

### Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues

Phone (03) 9349 3466  
info@cmymy.net.au  
cmymy.net.au

### Australian Sports Commission

All-Cultures website  
Phone: (02) 6214 1551  
coaching@ausport.gov.au  
ausport.gov.au

### Play by the Rules

*Playbytherules.net.au* is a website that offers free online training, information and resources for clubs and sporting organisations to ensure everyone involved in sport plays by the rules.

# Back to where it started



**PREMIERSHIP PLAYER:** Chris Johnson (being chaired off here by teammates Alastair Lynch and Martin Pike) was part of one of the most dominant sides in League history, playing in the Brisbane Lions 2001-03 premierships.

Chris Johnson made the game look easy in 264 classy games with Fitzroy and the Brisbane Lions. This year he has headed back to community football as a playing coach in the Essendon District Football League as he considers a career in coaching.

BY **KEN DAVIS**

As a player, Chris Johnson will be best remembered as an integral part of the Brisbane Lions 2001-03 premierships. Blessed with vision, poise, aggression and sublime skills, he made his name as a rebounding defender but was equally effective as a small forward or midfielder. In addition to his premierships honours, Johnson was a two-time All-Australian (2002 and 2004), named in the Indigenous Team of the Century in 2005 and a Lions co-captain in his final season, 2007. After retiring, Chris served as a development and assistant coach with Brisbane for two years and, in 2009, coached the Aboriginal All-Star team to a win against the Adelaide Crows in Darwin. This season, Chris has taken over as playing coach of Avondale Heights in the Essendon District Football League (EDFL). Here he outlines his coaching philosophy, the influences that have shaped it and his future plans.

## Early days

In juniors I just wanted to have fun playing and my coaches didn't focus much on winning but tried to develop our skills. When I moved to the Northern Knights I remember being impressed with the way Keith Burns used to turn out to train in full footy gear and he stressed how important it was to be proud to wear the jumper.

Keith had a background as a school teacher and he was very good at explaining things to you. He would never leave you until he was sure you understood what he meant. He would do that to the whole list so his attention to detail was a strength.

## League debut

I spent three years at Fitzroy and had three coaches – Robert Shaw, Bernie Quinlan and Mick Nunan. We didn't have great facilities and we moved around

a lot in the final years of the club. What I learnt was that it didn't matter what facilities you had when you were on the field. Every team in the competition had an oval on which to train. I made a point of focusing on training well on the track and working hard on my skills. This focus on self-improvement and not worrying about facilities helped to toughen my mind and improve my skills.

All my coaches were different – Shaw was hard, tough and demanded players maintain good skills. He never let up on you and if you let the team down he'd give you a spray. Quinlan had been a great player but he didn't get a lot of support in those difficult times. He had a good understanding of the game but the task was a bit overwhelming. Nunan was an innovator and focused on bringing knowledge from sports science into our preparation. He used heart-rate monitors well before other clubs started using them. He was knowledgeable and demanded precision, but did not over-complicate the game.

## Move to Brisbane

Initially, I was excited to be moving north to start afresh, but I did not get a game for a while and became homesick. I asked for a trade but thankfully nothing came of it and I had the most incredible journey, playing with a great club and a very tight group of players.

## Changing positions

Mick Nunan had tried me in defence and after a while Leigh played me there and I clicked immediately, gaining 19 touches in my first game for Brisbane. Leigh was supportive of me and I just had a new lease of life. I now encourage all my team to become multi-dimensional players who can play in various roles on the field.

**« I NOW ENCOURAGE ALL MY TEAM TO BECOME MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PLAYERS WHO CAN PLAY IN VARIOUS ROLES ON THE FIELD »**

## Impact of assistant coaches

Michael McLean was a huge influence on me. He was very good at sizing up how to exploit other players and made the game very clear. He worked well with Matthews and everyone ensured we were all speaking the same language. As I prepare to coach my own side, of course I will be influenced by my coaches but I now have a chance to implement some of my own ideas.

I also learnt a lot from Wayne and Craig Brittain when I was an assistant coach at the Lions. Both taught me a lot about football but most of all they taught me about being a good person. They cared for the players and were interested in their lives outside of football.

## On Leigh Matthews

He had a simple but firm game-plan but he still had the ability to treat individuals differently. From my own viewpoint, I always struggled with meeting group skinfold targets but Leigh accepted that I may have had a different body type and so long as I was playing good footy he made allowances for that. In a sense my skills made up for skinfold deficiencies.

Most of my coaching philosophy comes from Leigh. As you would expect given his playing background, Leigh was ruthless on keeping your head and shoulders over the ball. He kept things simple, spoke well and became calmer after an initial phase of shouting/screaming. He had a wonderful way of analysing the game and coming up with strategies to change momentum. He has a vast knowledge of football.

## Other AFL coaches

Let me say firstly how much I admire anyone who coaches at the top level. It is such a demanding job trying to get the best out of 45 or so different individuals. There is a load of information to process from the coaches, committee, media and fans. Mick Malthouse (Collingwood) seems to get the best out of individuals and Neil Craig (Adelaide) seems to look outside the box in seeking scientific solutions to improve preparation and performance.

## Things to avoid as a coach

I've learned never to embarrass anyone in public – it is far better to deal with individuals on their own. I will work on keeping my composure and being calm in a crisis and will avoid ranting and raving.

## Coaching Career

### STEPS TO DEVELOP MY COACHING

I have tried to have an open mind and listen to all people who have coached. I have been through the coaching accreditation process and found it helpful in sorting out how I want to coach. When coaching the Brisbane Lions reserves team I only got to see the players on the weekend. In my new role as playing coach of Avondale Heights in the EDFL, I will be able to guide my players' preparation more, so the role will be both more demanding and rewarding.



**WORK IN PROGRESS:** Not yet sure he wants to be a career coach, Chris Johnson is testing the waters this year in the EDFL and, in this picture, with indigenous players in the Rio Tinto Footy Means Business program.

### PREVIOUS COACHING/LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Aside from my work as a Brisbane Lions assistant coach, I have been fortunate to have been involved with developing footballers in the far north of Australia in many remote areas with the Flying Boomerangs. We aim not only to develop footballers but leaders as well. We bring 50 players to Melbourne each year and 25 form the Flying Boomerangs for that year. Some of those players have been drafted and that has been satisfying. Importantly, the program has taught me how to motivate young indigenous players to develop their football and life skills to such an extent that they are better prepared to live their dream of becoming an AFL footballer.

### COMMUNITY FOOTBALL PLAYING COACH.

I took on the coaching role of Avondale Heights in the EDFL this year to test whether I want to pursue coaching in my own right. I have enjoyed coaching with the Brisbane Lions but it is very time consuming and, with a young family, I am aware of the need to achieve balance in my life. I think being involved at this community level should provide the opportunity for a better work-life balance.

My role will be as a playing coach and I recognise that this will provide unique challenges. I will need to rely on my assistant coaches for feedback and will probably play in a position that allows me to watch the game unfold a bit, rather than being in the midfield among the action all the time. I am looking forward to the challenge. **CE**

**‘I’VE LEARNED NEVER TO EMBARRASS ANYONE IN PUBLIC – IT IS FAR BETTER TO DEAL WITH INDIVIDUALS ON THEIR OWN. I WILL WORK ON KEEPING MY COMPOSURE?’**

*Chris is currently completing the AFL High Performance Coach Accreditation.*

# The role of the midfield sweeper

In this position, a player is used as a spare man but has to work hard for his side in attack and defence as well as in the midfield. BY SHANE O'BREE

## Position description

A midfield sweeper must know who is around them depending on the position of the ground they are in and the team set-ups for that area. They must also be able to assess the situation on the ground, whether in the forward line, midfield or defence.

## Key relationships

Whether in attack, defence or at a midfield stoppage, they must communicate with their teammates in those areas of the ground. Even though midfield sweepers are free players, they must know who their opponent is and consider how dangerous the opponent's positioning is to the team. This may determine where they should be setting up. It is also crucial they know when to attack and defend – they don't want to desert their defence or crowd their forward line.

## Main responsibilities

Their main aim is to get into the right position – as required in defence, attack or the midfield – to help their team. They must be a player who all their teammates trust to do the right thing, and cannot be a lazy player.

## Expectations of the midfield sweeper

- In the forward 50: If midfielders go to a forward stoppage, the midfield sweeper must make themselves dangerous to catch their opponent out. If forwards are at the stoppage, they should make a wall to fill in the space where the opposition may go. In general play and when in space in the forward line, they should slide forward and try to kick a goal.
- In defensive 50: They should fill the most dangerous space in their defensive 50. If the opposition has a dominant forward, they should keep an eye on them to cut off their leads. If the ball is kicked long into the defensive 50, they should get back to give their side numbers around the ball when it hits the ground. At stoppages, they should position themselves on the defensive side to be an option their side can feed the ball back to, or in case the opposition hits the ball forward.



**TIME AND SPACE:**  
Carlton's Bryce Gibbs is a master at finding space as a midfield sweeper.

- At stoppages in general play: They should set up as a sweeper on the defensive side of the stoppage, as an option for a backwards handball and in case the opposition midfield gets a free run, in which case they can hold them up or get off a quick relieving kick. If they sense the time is right to attack, they should ensure they are on the move to receive a hit-out or a handball on the fly.

## Characteristics of successful midfield sweepers

They must:

- Read the play well.
- Use the ball well.
- Be a good decision-maker by hand and foot.
- Be a good communicator.
- Not get flustered.

**‘THEY MUST BE  
A PLAYER THEIR  
TEAMMATES  
TRUST TO DO THE  
RIGHT THING’**

Shane O'Bree

# Coaching the position

## Key points to get across to the player

The midfield sweeper must:

- Realise their importance in the team structure.
- Realise it is not all about them – their focus must be on what is best for the team.
- Have a good knowledge of the opposition and their teammates.
- Read the play well.
- Be able to assess game situations quickly.

## Specific training for the position

- A lot of stoppage work at training in all areas of the ground, practising being the spare man.
- Game simulation where there is one extra player on one side (the midfield sweeper) and that player practises getting themselves free.
- Watch a lot of video footage of the opposition.
- The coach should provide one-on-one guidance at team reviews and on the player's positioning during games.

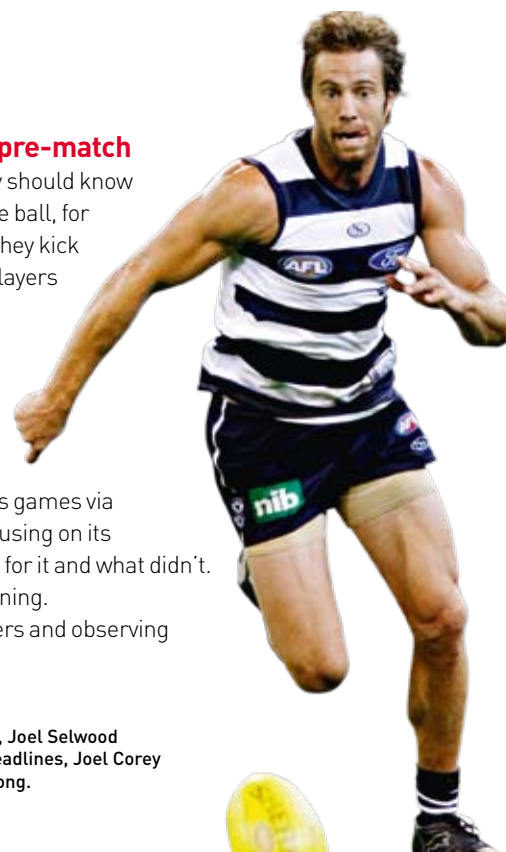
## Scouting the opposition pre-match

- By the time of the game, they should know how the opposition moves the ball, for instance, at kick-ins, where they kick their goals from and which players they look for most.

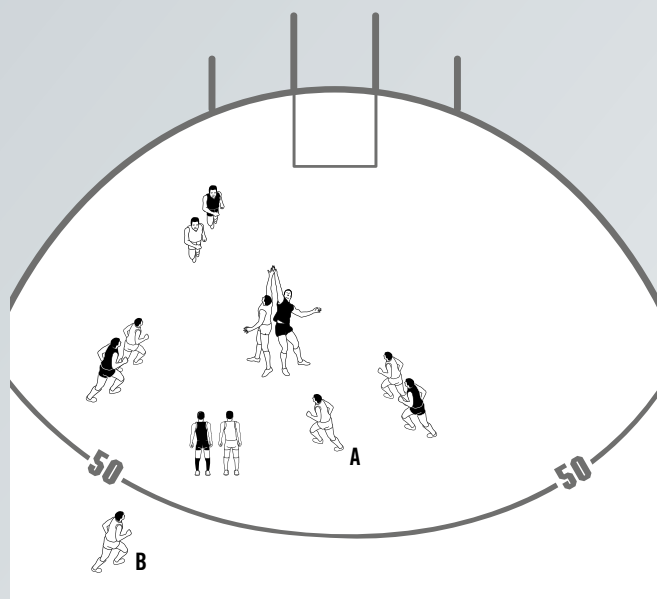
## Key hints to excelling in the position

- The player must want to learn.
- Watch a lot of the opposition's games via behind-the-goal footage, focusing on its positioning and what worked for it and what didn't.
- Watch stoppages and positioning.
- Watch other midfield sweepers and observing what works for them.

**UNsung HERO:** While Gary Ablett, Joel Selwood and Jimmy Bartel may grab the headlines, Joel Corey plays a vital midfield role for Geelong.



## PLAYING AS A MIDFIELD SWEEPER



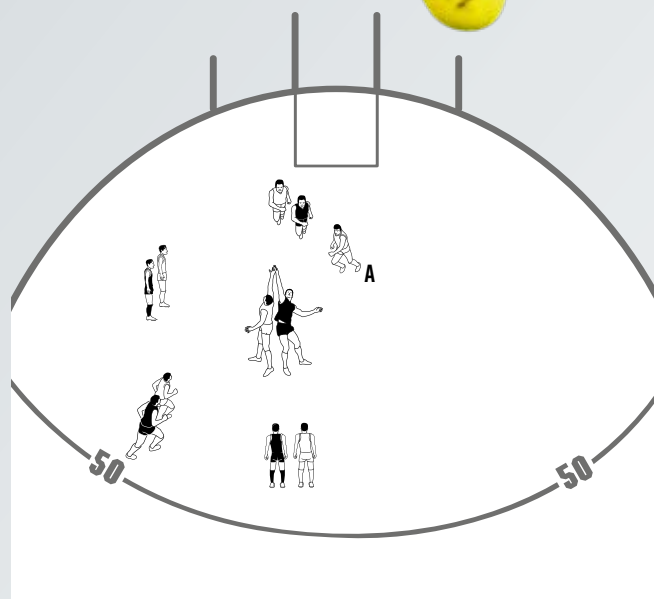
### DEFENSIVE 50 STOPPAGE

#### Option A:

- Player A dangerously positioned where they may either receive a handball or crumb a hit-out and kick a goal.
- In this position, they will attract an opposition player, freeing space for their forwards to run into.

#### Option B:

- Player B positioned a kick behind play, where they can gather the ball and use it by hand or foot, sending it back into their forward 50.
- They can also help their defence if the opposition makes a quick play from the forward stoppage.



### FORWARD 50 STOPPAGE

- Player A positioned between the goals and the stoppage.
- Is there a 'feedback' option and to stop any opposition player coming through.
- Can fly 'third man up' at a stoppage to clear the ball.

Shane O'Bree is a Collingwood midfielder, currently playing his 13th AFL season after debuting with the Brisbane Lions in 1998. This article was written as part of the requirements of the AFL/AFLPA Level 2 Coaching Course.

# Developing players' game sense

As important as a player's skills and technique are, their ability to make the right decision in a split second while under fierce pressure is just as important. Fortunately, you can train them to develop the right instincts.

BY RAY BREED

Game-sense training involves three main areas of improvement – technical skill, tactical skill and team play.

## Implicit and explicit learning

The two key types of learning are implicit and explicit learning:

- Implicit learning takes place when you learn skills through undertaking practice tasks but without direct instruction on how to complete those tasks.
- Explicit learning takes place when you learn skills through direct verbal instruction on how to perform a task.

## Why use implicit game-based training?

- Elite players have better decision-making skills than lesser players.
- Football is an 'open' skilled game, i.e. techniques are performed within a variety of situations.
- Well-rehearsed techniques can often break down in a game under fatigue and pressure.
- It is well documented implicit training – learning subconsciously from 'doing' and developing 'experience' in this way – more effectively translates into performance than explicit methods of instruction (structured drills).
- In terms of player learning, the lessons learned in implicit games stay with players longer and are less likely to be affected by pressure/fatigue in games.

## Features of implicit game-based training

- 1 Player-centred – coaches guide/facilitate players to explore options by asking questions.
- 2 The emphasis is on decision-making in certain tactical situations that might occur in a match.
- 3 Implicit learning – players often learn subconsciously by experiencing certain situations and 'learning from mistakes'.
- 4 Indirect learning takes place through problem solving.

## Player decision-making involves

**Tactical knowledge:** What to do if ... (knowledge of the game/rules/team plans).

**Reading the play:**

- Pattern recognition – the ability to see a play unfolding, and its likely outcome.
- Movement cues – postural position of other players, e.g. tackling, leading, kick direction.

Area	Aim	Features
<b>Technical skill</b>	Develop ability to perform a technique more effectively, e.g. kicking, marking, ruck tap work, set shots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ High repetition</li> <li>→ More explicit learning</li> <li>→ Often individual or simple drill-based</li> </ul>
<b>Tactical skill (game sense)</b>	Develop ability to improve decision-making and skills under pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ High repetition</li> <li>→ More implicit learning</li> <li>→ Practise under variable conditions</li> <li>→ Small-sided games</li> </ul>
<b>Team style of play</b>	Develop understanding of team plays that form a framework in which to make decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Low repetition</li> <li>→ Large-sided games/walk-throughs/demos</li> <li>→ More structured scenarios, e.g. kick-ins</li> <li>→ Mix of explicit and implicit learning</li> </ul>

## The decision-making process

**Scanning** - quickly searching a visual display, e.g. high/low and left/right eye movements.

**Perception** - collecting and interpreting the scanned information.

**Attention** - identifying relevant stimuli/ignoring irrelevant stimuli.

**Response selection** - picking the best option to suit the tactical scenario.

**Skill execution** - performing a technique appropriate for a given situation.

## How does game sense work?

A consistent technique can break down in game/competitive situations when exposed to 'distractions' (external and internal), such as pressure, fatigue, noise and visual stimuli. By practising a variety of scenarios in game settings, players learn to ignore such irrelevant stimuli, and focus on the relevant ones.

By providing tactical situations that are repetitive, players can improve their decision-making skills (e.g. when and where to pass/run) through experience and learning from good and poor decisions. Such decisions become automatic, allowing more time to focus on executing skills. You need to make mistakes to learn!





**REBOUNDED DEFENDER:**  
Collingwood half-back Heath Shaw has a great sense of when to defend and when to attack.

### Coaching/teaching points

The coach establishes a learning environment and uses questioning and guided discovery to help players learn to address tactical situations.

### Guidelines for developing game sense

- 1 Have an aim or theme for each game. What are we trying to achieve?
- 2 Use teams of two to six players to maximise the number of decisions they make – repetition.
- 3 Are there small scenarios that occur frequently in a game that you should be replicating? For example, two-versus-two contested ball, four-versus-three in the defensive 50 and subsequent rebound, three-versus-two overlap handball, with defenders zoning off.
- 4 Timing – drills need to be long enough to allow plenty of repetition to develop the players' experience and long-term recall of the specific situations.
- 5 What are the main rules of the game? What's the size of the area it's played in? These can be adjusted during the game.
- 6 Prepare variations for the game. For example, add another defender.
- 7 Develop questions to assist in the learning process.
- 8 Balance the introduction of new or difficult concepts and random practice.

## Guidelines for teaching the game

- 1 Explain the purpose of the game.
- 2 Explain briefly (four to five points maximum) the rules and limitations of the game, such as the area of play and duration of the game.
- 3 Let them play for a few minutes and observe (evaluate while observing).
- 4 Consider whether the game is working. If not, how can you modify it? For example, change the size of the playing area, team sizes, positions or rules.
- 5 Vary the level of pressure. For example, change the rules – extra defender(s), less space, the level of tackling.
- 6 Ask individual questions during the activity or recovery periods; e.g. Was that your best option?
- 7 Look for 'teachable moments': stop the game at appropriate points to ask tactical questions to the group. For example, how else could your team have defended that last play?
- 8 Freeze the play to demonstrate a point, then rehearse and replay that scenario.
- 9 Provide feedback on good and poor decisions. Question the players on how they think they performed.
- 10 In giving feedback try not to 'tell' players where they went right or wrong – frame your feedback in the form of questions.

## Evaluate the game

- 1 Did the game address the outcomes you set out to achieve? Why/why not? Consider areas such as technical skill practice, decision-making and physical conditioning.
- 2 How could you modify the game to better address these areas?
- 3 Was there sufficient repetition of skills?
- 4 Was player involvement maximised?
- 5 Can the game progress into a more advanced version?

## Questioning

A coach's role is to assist players in solving tactical problems, rather than solving the problems for them. Using questions will help guide players in the right direction.

Questions should revolve around four key concepts:

- 1 Time – when should you have done A, B or C? How long do you have to do each?
- 2 Space (in possession) – how and where do you create space? (e.g. Leading patterns, blocking.) How do you deny space (not in possession)? (e.g. Corridor, zoning, team defence.)
- 3 Risk – which option was best? Why? Does the score and time of game affect your decision?
- 4 Execution – how should you have attempted that kick, handball, mark? What was the best technique for that situation?

Turn feedback into questions to direct and test a player's learning. When, what, where, why, how?

### Individual learning question examples

Who was the best person to pass to? (John). Why? (For example, he was the best long option or was one on one, leading in front of his opponent.)

- When was the best time to pass? Why? (After drawing a defender, as that created a free player.)
- Where was the best place to run? Why? (Wide to space, as it would drag your opponent out to open up space in the corridor.)
- What was the best way to pass the ball? (Short and flat) Why? (With less air time the opposition is less likely to intercept the pass.)
- What was the best option? (Take the space) Why? (All teammates are manned or opposition has zoned deep in defence.)



**GOOD DECISION-MAKER:**  
North Melbourne skipper Brent Harvey reads the game as well as anyone in the AFL.

### Team-based learning question examples

- What strategies did you use when in possession? Which ones worked well? Why?
- What type of defence did you use? How could you have done it better?
- What would you do differently if the opposition had zoned?
- How could you move the ball quicker?
- What can the attacking team do to create space better?
- What would you do differently if the opposition had three effective clearances in a row?
- What would you do if our team won possession of the ball in our defensive 50 with two minutes left in the game?

To develop strategy, we can tailor the games as follows:

- 1 One team has to attack for a time (e.g. five minutes) or for a number of trials (e.g. six successes from 10 trials).
- 2 Give one group a task (unknown to the opposition), e.g. to use a zone defence only.
- 3 Set a scenario, e.g. there are two minutes left in the game, with the attacking team up by two points.
- 4 Have one team observe and evaluate tactics, or play experienced teams against inexperienced teams.

## GAME-SENSE DRILLS

### PRISON BREAK

#### DESIRED OUTCOMES

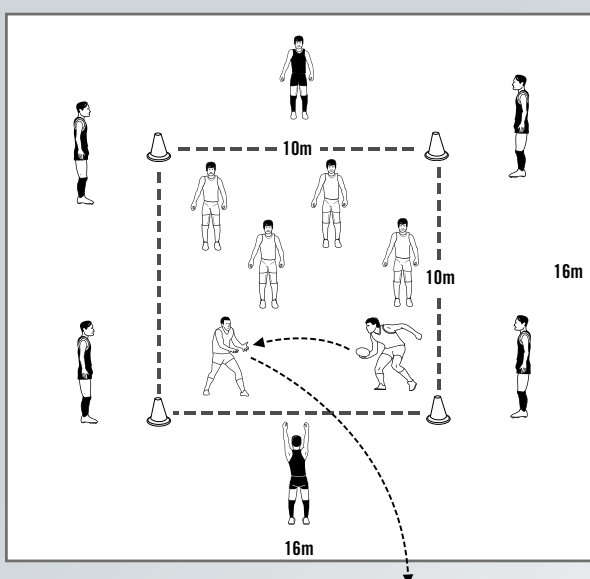
- 1 Attacking team: to identify space in the defensive zone, outnumber the opposition, move the ball quickly to catch the opposition's defence out of position.
- 2 Defending team: to quickly shift its defence around to deny the opposition space.

#### GAME DESCRIPTION

- 1 Teams of five versus five or six versus six. Mark out a square (about 10x10m) with another one about 3m outside it.
- 2 One team starts as defenders, the other as attackers, with the ball in the inside square.
- 3 After 90 seconds, the teams swap roles.
- 4 Defenders can move anywhere in the outer square, but cannot enter the inside square.
- 5 The aim is for the attacking team to pass the ball around or run with the ball, until it can run the ball through the outer square, without being tagged/tackled by a defender.
- 6 If a score is recorded, the ball is placed on the ground and a teammate picks it up to continue play by running it back into the inner square. The same occurs if a tag/tackle is made in the outer square before the opposition has crossed the outer square.
- 7 If a score or a tag has been made on one of the four sides, that side becomes out of bounds, so the defensive team has only three sides to protect at one time, until another score or tag/tackle is made on another side (i.e. teams can't score or be tagged on the same side in succession).

#### VARIATION

- 1 Add a defender to the inside square to put pressure on passes (the defensive team earns a point for each interception).



■ Attack ■ Defence

### IN THE ZONE GAMES

#### DESIRED OUTCOMES

- 1 Develop knowledge and skills to know when to pass and when to run with the ball.
- 2 Develop knowledge and skills about when to run and where to run to receive the ball.
- 3 Develop the defensive skills required to read cues of attackers and to know when to pressure the ball-carrier and when to drop off to cover receivers.

#### (A) IN THE ZONE: 3-v-1

- 1 Two attackers begin with the ball, with one attacker starting behind the end-zone. This player can run in to create a three-versus-one scenario in any zone.
- 2 Each defender must stay within their zone.
- 3 The aim is for the attacking team to move the ball through the zone without it being intercepted.
- 4 The game can be extended to finish with a shot on goal, where the last defender in the zone chases and puts pressure on three attackers as they attempt to score.

#### (B) IN THE ZONE: 3-v-2 OR 4-v-2

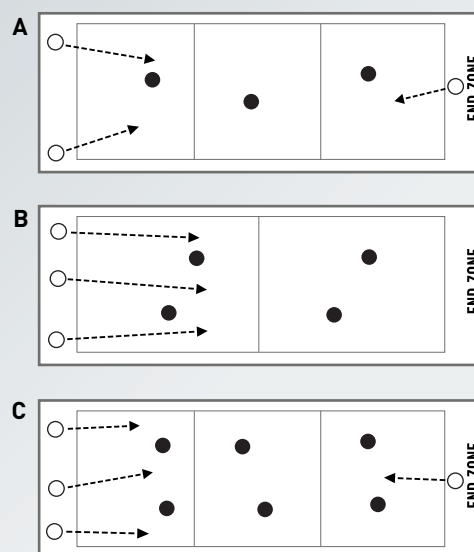
- 1 Two defenders must stay in each zone.
- 2 The aim is for three or four attackers to move the ball through the area over the end line.
- 3 The area can be made bigger to include kicking.

#### (C) IN THE ZONE: 4-v-2

- 1 As above, but add a third zone.
- 2 Have a support player who starts behind the end zone but can run into the last two zones to support the other attackers as they move the ball through the area.

#### VARIATIONS

- 1 Once the attackers are past the end zone, they continue on to kick a goal. The defender(s) in the last zone apply pressure.
- 2 As above, except they continue on to kick the ball to a two-versus-one situation (two forwards versus one defender).



## GAME-SENSE DRILLS

### GAUNTLET: 2-v-1

#### DESIRED OUTCOMES

- 1 Develop knowledge and skills to know when to pass and when to run with the ball.
- 2 Develop knowledge and skills about where to move to receive the ball.

#### GAME DESCRIPTION

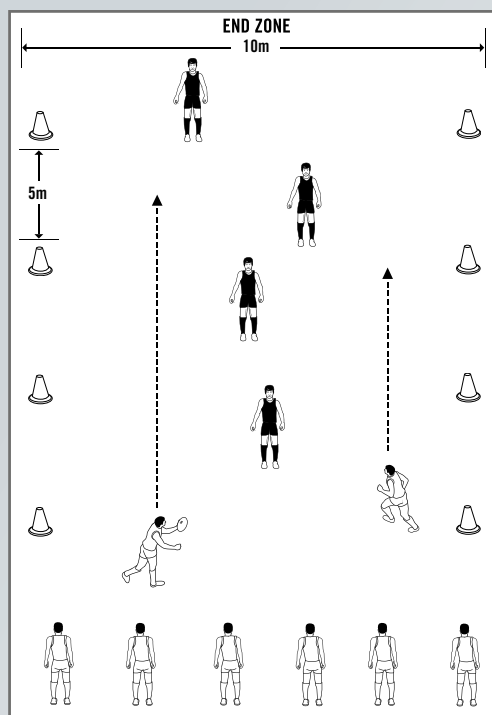
- 1 In pairs, players must get the ball over the end line without any defenders touching the ball. No contact allowed.
- 2 Attackers can run with the ball or pass it.
- 3 Four defenders must stay on their line, i.e. they can only move side to side.
- 4 Allow at least 5m between each defensive line, with zones about 10m wide.

#### VARIATIONS

- 1 Attackers must pass the ball in each zone.
- 2 Once they are over the end line, the last defender chases while the two other players aim to kick a goal.
- 3 Three-versus-two Gauntlet and zone Gauntlet.

#### GROUP ORGANISATION

- 1 Players pair up. Then place two pairs on the defensive lines, i.e. four players.
- 2 Have two grids side by side, with five metres between them for safety and so the coach can walk between them to give feedback.
- 3 Rotate defenders once every pair has been through each grid twice.



■ Attack ■ Defence

### BREAKOUT: 4-v-2

#### DESIRED OUTCOMES

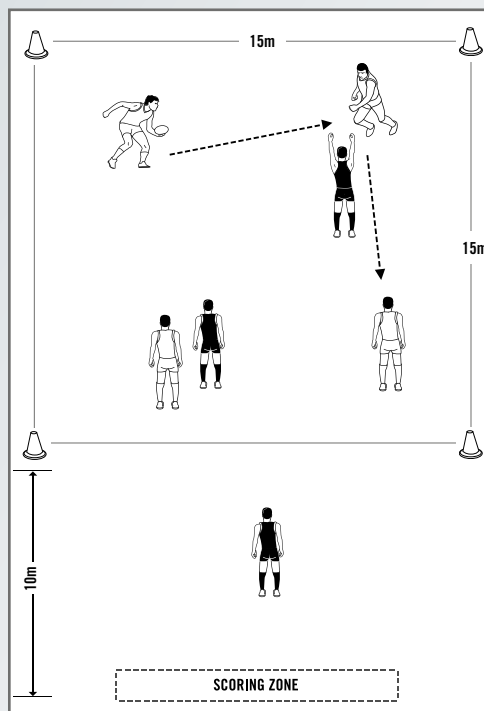
- 1 Develop knowledge and skills to know when and where to pass.
- 2 Develop knowledge and skills relating to creating space and increasing the time you have to pass.
- 3 Develop defensive knowledge and skills to decrease time and space for the attacking team. Learning to read cues on where the attacking team will pass.

#### GAME DESCRIPTION

- 1 In groups of six, have four attackers and two defenders in a 15-x-15m square. Add an extra defender zoned off outside of square.
- 2 It can also be played as a five-versus-three scenario (harder for attackers).
- 3 The attacking team start with the ball, and aim to keep it off the defenders.
- 4 On the coach's call, the attackers break out of the area and aim to score by running or passing the ball over an end line or into a scoring zone.
- 5 Rotate roles after every five attempts. How many times were the attackers successful?

#### HINT

- 1 Attackers should look for space, then spread and separate out to make it harder for the defenders to cover them.



For more games visit the coaching section of the AFL Community Club web portal <http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au>

Ray Breed is high performance manager at the North Melbourne Football Club and is an accredited AFL high performance coach. This article is a summary of a workshop about game-sense coaching presented at the 2010 AFL National Coaching Conference.

# From the ice rink to the footy field

Our resident Canadian **Chris Donahoe** contemplates how he will explain the rules of Australian Football to his father, a typical Canadian ice hockey and gridiron fan, when he visits in July.

▶ My parents are coming. They're braving the around-the-world flight and forfeiting a month of Canada's short summer and gaining almost a month of Australia's winter. In preparation, we've kitted them out with all the Geelong gear – 150th-anniversary jumper, beanie and scarf – they'll need to barrack for the Cats at the MCG against Hawthorn on July 10. Last Christmas we also sent a copy of the 1989 Grand Final DVD and a big hand-made poster, complete with a drawing of a football ground, a list of the positions and the basic rules of the game.

My father put the poster up on the wall next to the TV in the basement. Sometimes I imagine him sitting there, admiring my stick drawings. When I have asked him what he thinks of the game, he says, "It's great", but that's been it. That, in Dad-speak, means he likes it, but doesn't necessarily get it. I was lucky when I first started watching because I had lifelong fans of the game to help explain it to me while my father only has a crudely drawn poster.

Even now, as I watch the game, sometimes it feels quite haphazard and disorganised. I realise this is because I am still very green and the positioning and plays are not always obvious because the field is so large and filled with so many players. But even someone who hasn't taken a hockey puck to the head will admit a big reason footy is so exciting is because so often it's a game of organised chaos.



**AN EXCITING FIRST:** Chris Donahoe is taking his father to see his first game of Australian Football in round 15, when Geelong take on Cyril Rioli and his Hawks teammates at the MCG.

There was an interesting development in the AFL last season, however, that leads me to believe there could be a little more organisation and a little less chaos. Finally, the faithful reader of my column says to themselves, 'He's actually got something to say that might relate to coaching'. Please bear with me.

In recent years it has become more common for teams to flood their forward 50 after scoring a behind in an attempt to stop the opposition moving the ball out of defence. This is no different to, say, a full-court press in basketball, the forecheck in ice hockey or a blitz in gridiron. As a result, teams were struggling to move the ball downfield and were being forced to retreat back into the goalsquare, occasionally surrendering behinds for the opportunity to start over again. Who didn't revel in the boos and jeers hurled at a player who was forced into committing this embarrassing 'offence'?

The AFL responded by making such rushed behinds illegal. At the time, it seemed everyone wiped the dirt from their hands as if to say, 'Well, that settles that'. But I couldn't shake the feeling – like when you take a hockey puck to the head – that something had slipped under the radar.

I rubbed the big scar above my eye until it dawned on me that teams being unable to move the ball from the goalsquare to at least the midfield should be so rare it does not require an extra rule. Then the scar glowed like Harry Potter's lightning bolt and I felt I should, even as a novice footy viewer, be able to see a well-rehearsed set of plays that could, in any given circumstance, be used to make a turnover in defence as uncommon as it is in other sports.

And so, as I prepare to take my father to the holy of holies – a game at the MCG; it will be my first too – I find myself watching the first half of this season and thinking about other aspects of the game that deserve a second look. I'm thinking about how I'm going to pass on the footy knowledge I've picked up over a pie and sauce, but also about the other details I might have missed.

It will be interesting to find out what Dad's first questions will be. How will I explain 'holding the ball' to a gridiron fan accustomed to a set of rules for determining when a player is 'down'? Will he yell in disappointment with the rest of us – like he does during an odd-man rush at a hockey game – when a player decides to kick over the mark instead of playing on aggressively? Will he marvel at the fitness and skill of the umpires, or will I have to explain that there are only three of them?

I wonder if his questions will be the same ones I asked. But mostly I wonder if I'll be able to answer them. I've got until July to prepare myself. **CE**



# They hit targets at training

**KICKING DEMON:** Melbourne's Aaron Davey is renowned for his accurate and penetrating kicking.

By simulating match pressure in drills, coaches can prepare players to kick the ball quickly and accurately in games.  
BY **KEN DAVIS**

▶ If you watch an AFL team train, kicks normally hit their targets. Have you ever wondered why players can pass the ball at training with such precision the ball rarely touches the ground, and yet in games those same players regularly miss their intended teammates?

Closer analysis of kicking drills at training reveals even though coaches urge their players to operate at match intensity they often don't. Subtle changes can occur that can give the impression kicking is precise, however, the team may not be able to display such skill in a game.

So what is happening at training that is not happening under the pressure of a game? Firstly, if you look at a team's kicking at training you need to watch the receivers closely. Without an opponent to pressure them, they can slow down

to mark a ball that would otherwise go behind them if they maintain top pace. In a game, such a kick would be easily spoiled by an attentive close-checking opponent.

You ideally want kicks delivered so that a leading player does not have to slow down in order to mark the ball. Obviously this precision is not as necessary if the receiver is wide open. However, when a player has an opponent in hot pursuit, such control of the kick is paramount if the team wants to retain possession.

The key point here is to do drills where the ball must be delivered in front of the leading player running at top pace. It is better to err by kicking the ball so that it lands in front of the receiver as they can then run onto the ball. Kicks that force the receiver to slow down to mark need to be eliminated.

Secondly, in training drills without opposition, players often hold on to the ball for a longer time than they can in a game. When being watched by coaches, many slow down or take more time to steady so that they can be seen to be hitting targets. Such a careful approach may not prepare them for the pressure of kicking in a game.

During my involvement at AFL clubs I collected data that reveals interesting information about this issue. As part of my research, I counted the number of steps players took before delivering the ball during training, and then compared that to a game situation. In drills where players were not pressured by an opponent, the good kickers invariably took fewer steps to deliver the ball than their less skilful teammates. The good kicks seemed to impose match intensity on themselves and often delivered the ball within a range of three to five steps. The poorer kickers often took up to nine steps to deliver the ball.

In the game following that training session, more than 70 per cent of kicks were executed by players within five steps of receiving the ball.

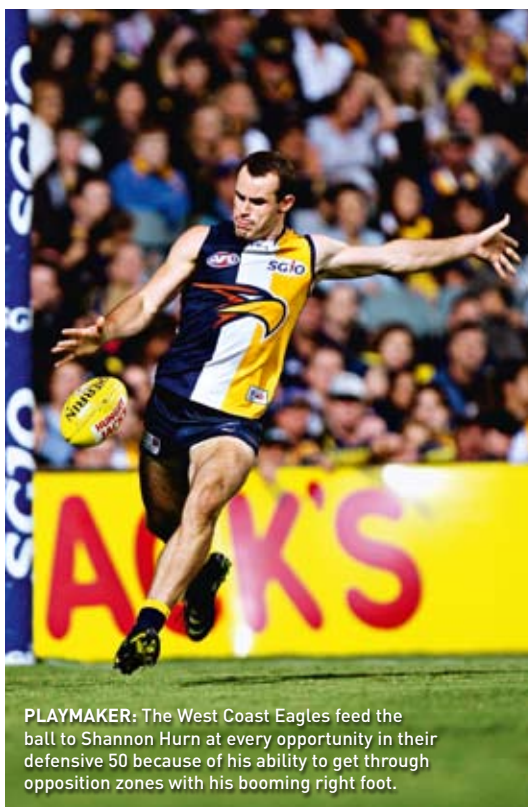
Tables 1 and 2 show the differences in steps taken before kicking at training and in games. In four drills observed at the training session, players typically took far more than five steps before kicking. For instance, in 'lane work' only 40 per cent of kicks were completed within five steps, with more than half completed after six to eight steps.

Players took even more steps before kicking in the 'in air' drill. Here, the ball was delivered high to a receiver who fed the ball by hand to a runner, who then kicked to a receiver at the other end. Clearly, this drill did not place players under enough pressure, with nearly 70 per cent taking more than nine steps to kick the ball. This may be a very good drill but players need to be encouraged to kick the ball within five steps.

In Table 1, the average number of steps before kicking is outlined for both the training drills and the game. In the game the average number of steps in general play was slightly more than four, while after a mark it was less than three. However, in all of the training drills the minimum average was nearly six steps.

This data shows coaches need to be aware of the number of steps taken to deliver the ball at training. While it is wise to run drills where players take their time to steady and execute their skills precisely, it is also very important for players to simulate match pressure by practising kicking in less than five steps while running at full pace.

The key lesson for coaches here is to make sure you impose conditions on drills that encourage players to kick the ball quickly after receiving the ball. Having an assistant coach count the number of steps players are taking at training can also provide useful feedback to both coaches and players. **CE**

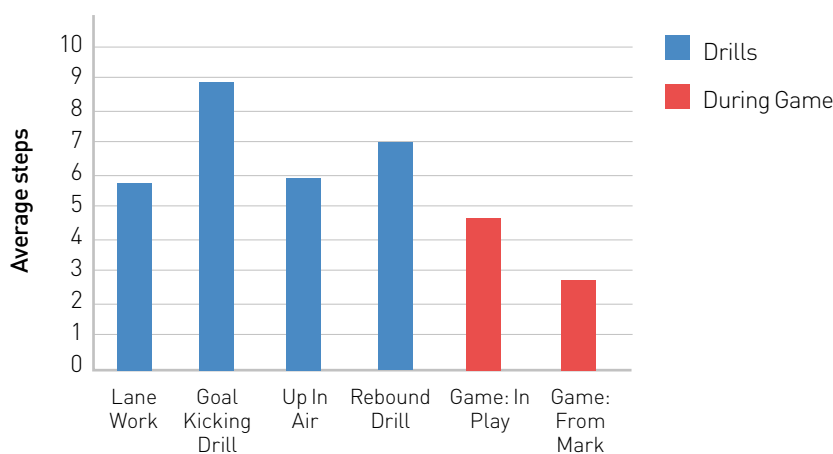


**PLAYMAKER:** The West Coast Eagles feed the ball to Shannon Hurn at every opportunity in their defensive 50 because of his ability to get through opposition zones with his booming right foot.

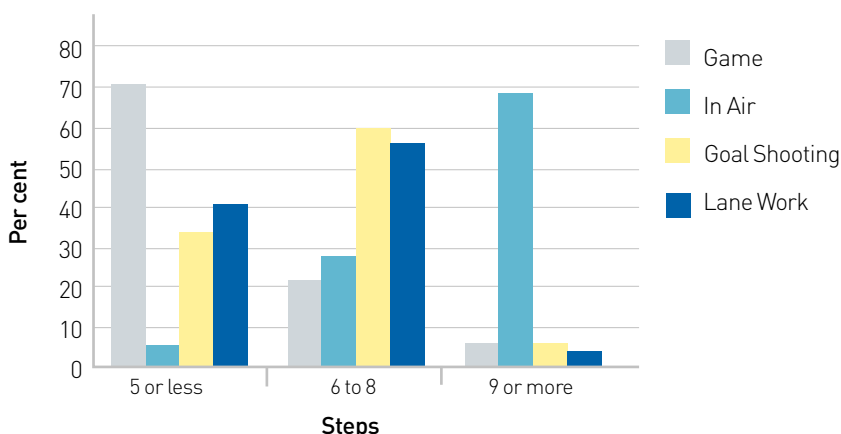
**IT IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT FOR PLAYERS TO SIMULATE MATCH PRESSURE BY PRACTISING KICKING IN LESS THAN FIVE STEPS WHILE RUNNING AT FULL PACE**

### Steps taken to kick in the AFL: training v games

#### 1. NUMBER OF STEPS BY AVERAGE



#### 2. NUMBER OF STEPS BY PERCENTAGE



The figures in these tables were taken from one training session of an AFL club and its following game.



**THE GAME'S DEMANDS:**  
Elite football places different demands on senior and junior players, but there has been minimal research on junior movement patterns.

# What makes an elite junior player

The physical and skill demands on junior players in matches are significantly different to those on senior players, and their training should be tailored accordingly.

BY **JAMES VEALE & ALAN PEARCE**

▶ The growing professionalism of Australian Football has seen significant increases in the physical demands placed on players due to the increasing pace of the game. Recent analysis of football at the elite senior level has illustrated the physical demands required of positions in the professional game and shows movement patterns and activities differ between grouped playing positions such as midfielders, small forwards and defenders, centre half-forwards and centre half-backs, full-forwards and full-backs, and ruckmen. Players in these positions recorded differences in their overall distances travelled during games, the number of sprints and changes in direction, and in their specific game activities such as marks, kicks and handballs.

The modern game is characterised by a more intermittent style of play with a substantial increase in the number of high-intensity (fast running and sprinting) efforts for players in all positions.

These changes have led Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) physiologist and AFL Draft Camp testing coordinator David Pyne and others to suggest the specific body types and physical specialisations by position to meet present-day playing demands. They suggested that assigning players, based on body type and fitness characteristics, to specific field positions within Australian Football could be

made possible through the development of specific reference measures for each position.

Only a limited amount of systematic game-day movement data analysis has been conducted within elite junior football. Preliminary analyses of game movement patterns show similar trends to elite senior data for position-specific differences. However, comparisons to senior match data show notable differences between elite junior and senior levels that may be attributed to training and age, style of play, physical development and/or technical expertise.

A renewed interest in positional game-day demands within elite Australian Football has highlighted the lack of similar research at the elite junior level.

Victoria University researchers James Veale, Dr Alan Pearce and Professor John Carlson conducted a study on positional demands in a TAC Cup team during the 2006 season, collecting data in matches on changes of direction (COD), jumps, lead in and sprint duration characteristics; and game-skills execution. This study, when combined with previously presented information from studies of senior football, provides coaches with specific and developmentally appropriate information for the design and prescription of training and conditioning drills for junior players.



## THE STUDY

Thirty players (with an average age of 17.7 years) from a team competing in the Victorian TAC Cup were monitored in the study. Position groups were tracked over seven home games during the season. Players were not aware they were being tracked. Six of the matches were played in dry conditions, with wet weather affecting one match.

### VIDEO PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

Three playing positions were videotaped at each home game. Each position category was videotaped three times throughout the season. The player who started in the position of interest each quarter was videotaped until he changed position or left the ground and the position recording was continued with the new player, ensuring the position (rather than player) was recorded for the game duration (with between two to five players rotating between the position).

### MOVEMENT PATTERNS

The videos were reviewed and analysed using the Prowess video analysis system and the following movement patterns completed by each playing position were documented:

- Running – purposeful running but not near maximum speed.
- Sprinting – running at top speed (greater than 95 per cent effort).

The following movement categories were also calculated:

- Number of efforts spent moving at each movement pattern (running and sprinting).
- Average time for each effort completed in the two movement patterns.
- Distance for each effort – all participating players were filmed in two trials over a 20m distance, one running and the other sprinting (as described). The trials were averaged to provide values for steps a second and metres a step, which were then multiplied by the time the player spent walking, jogging, running and sprinting throughout the game.

### SKILLS

The following skills were also recorded from the videos: kicks, marks, handballs (made and received), smothers, blocks, shepherds, tackles (effective and ineffective), spoils, running bounces, ruck contests, and ground ball pick-ups.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### CHANGES OF DIRECTION

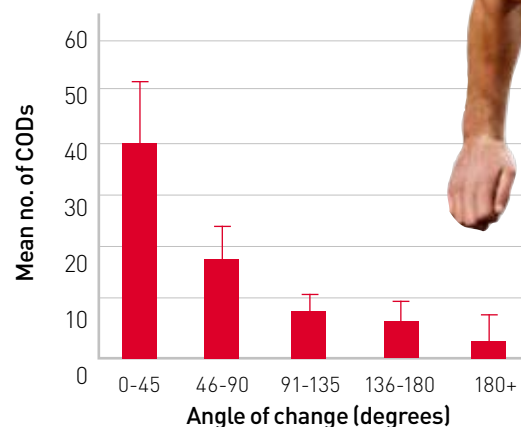
Similar to elite senior data, the majority of changes of direction (COD) recorded during high-intensity running and sprinting movements were made at an angle less than 90° and a significantly greater number of CODs were less than 45°. The running positions (midfield and wing) recorded more CODs in comparison to key-position players, further suggesting positional differences based on game-day roles.

These results suggest that current Australian Football-specific agility training should focus on using changes of direction between 0–45° lasting between three-four seconds an effort. Nevertheless, CODs greater than 45° should not be ignored, particularly for key-position players.

The CODs seen in this study relate to players responding to an external stimulus, for example, evading an opponent or reacting to the bounce of the ball. Therefore, while this study has provided new evidence of game-based COD angles during high-intensity running, when using this data in agility training for footballers consideration should be given to recent research that refers to an athlete's ability to move in direct response to an external stimulus ('reactive agility').

This also suggests the need to develop agility activities and tests that involve a reactive component for elite junior footballers. The agility test currently used within the AFL Talent Pathway has provided meaningful distinctions between players who are drafted into the AFL and those who are not, while small differences are also reported between those who went on to make their debut at this level. However, the COD results presented within this study demonstrate the measures used in the current test, which involves one left 225° turn, two right and one left 90° turns and one left 135° turn, is different to game-day movement data recorded in this study (Table 1).

### 1. CHANGE OF DIRECTION



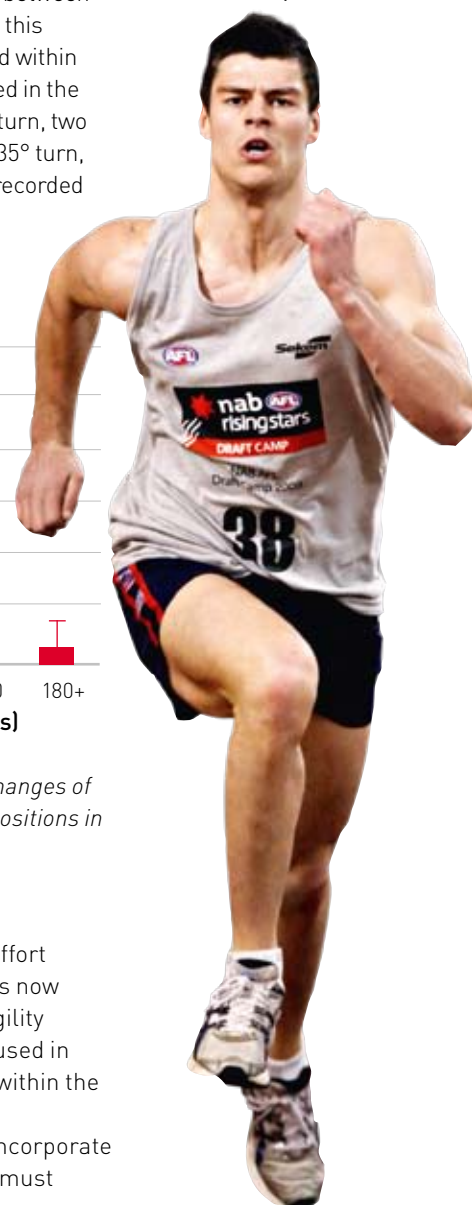
Figures represent the mean number of changes of direction made in a match by all playing positions in a selected TAC Cup side in 2006.

From the angles and high-intensity-effort durations recorded in this study, there is now appropriate data to design a reactive-agility test for elite junior football that can be used in fitness testing and talent identification within the development competition.

Training drills for CODs should also incorporate a reactive component where the player must respond to a game-based stimulus.

**‘TRAINING DRILLS FOR CODS SHOULD ALSO INCORPORATE A REACTIVE COMPONENT WHERE THE PLAYER MUST RESPOND TO A GAME-BASED STIMULUS’**

**MAKING THE GRADE:** Marcus Davies was drafted by Carlton after testing at last year's NAB AFL Draft Camp.





**GUT-BUSTING:**  
(L-R) Marcus Davies (subsequently drafted by Carlton), Ryan Bastinac (North Melbourne), Jake Melksham (Essendon) and Dustin Martin (Richmond) push themselves during the 'beep test' at last year's NAB AFL Draft Camp.

**LEAD-IN SPRINT INTENSITY**

This study was unique because it measured a player's lead-in sprint intensity, namely by recording their movement speed immediately prior to starting each sprint, along with the number of sprints completed by the seven positional categories.

Across all field positions, a common tendency was to sprint from a running start. Conversely only two sprints a game were completed from a stationary start across all playing positions. Therefore, to improve the game-specific nature of training, the results of this study suggest high-end speed work should be completed from a 'rolling' rather than stationary start to enhance the development of a football-specific acceleration ability.

When coupled with the COD results, this suggests such high-end sprinting work should also involve CODs to simulate game-day requirements and enhance the element of sport-specific training.

The results of this study also suggest the current 20m speed test from a stationary start is only useful in distinguishing 'pure' athletes from 'football' athletes.

Even so, training focused on acceleration, and related data, is still useful in monitoring the development of key-position players in the positions of centre half-forward, centre half-back, full-forward and full-back.

**GAME-SPECIFIC SKILLS**

The ruck and midfield positions executed the highest number of game-specific skills (Table 2) in comparison to the other field categories, a figure directly linked to the number of ruck contests these positions are involved in. In comparison, there was a clear distinction between their commonly high levels of skill involvement throughout a match and the moderate (half-forward flank, half-back flank and wing) and low (forward pocket, back pocket, centre half-back, centre half-back, full-forward and full-back) skill involvements of other positions. This further supports the position descriptions now used at the elite senior and junior levels; the key-position roles consistently recorded lower involvements across nine of the 13 skills measured.

Subsequently, game-specific training drills can be designed according to these commonly used position

**2. GAME-SPECIFIC SKILLS**

**6 HIGH-END SPEED WORK SHOULD BE COMPLETED FROM A 'ROLLING' RATHER THAN STATIONARY START TO ENHANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FOOTBALL-SPECIFIC ACCELERATION ABILITY?**

Field position	Kicks	Marks	Given	HANDBALLS		Blocks	Shepherds	TACKLES		Spoils	Ground ball pick-ups	Running bounces	Ruck contests
				Received	Smotherers			Effective	Ineffective				
Midfield	26	4	7	11	2	4	4	10	4	0	17	1	2
Wing	11	5	5	2	1	2	4	6	4	1	14	0	1
Ruck	4	4	10	4	1	0	5	7	2	4	8	0	66
HFF-HBF	12	3	6	5	0	2	3	6	5	1	13	1	1
CHF-CHB	6	5	2	1	0	0	3	3	1	2	5	0	8
FF-FB	8	4	3	2	0	0	1	3	1	2	5	0	2
FP-BP	12	3	5	3	0	1	1	5	2	2	12	0	0

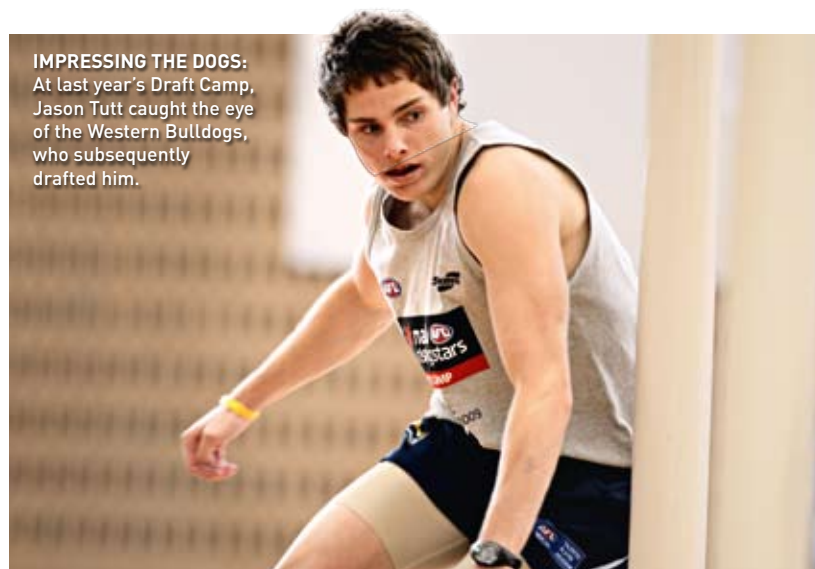
descriptions, complementing the involvements of each player in those positions.

With high-skill involvement positions, for example, training drills should include several game activities (ruck – ruck contests; midfield – kicks and ground-ball pick-ups) interspersed with all-ground movements that simulate game-distance demands. Research has shown such training methods using game-sense or skill-based activities, which allow the simulation of game-day movement patterns while including a competitive component, appropriately prepare all field positions for their match-day playing demands.

### JUMPS

According to the game-specific skill data presented in Table 2, 57 per cent of the game skills completed by the ruckmen were ruck contests, a skill requiring them to jump to gain first possession of the ball. Consequently, ruckmen completed the most jumps – across all different types of take-offs – compared to the positions, with 66 per cent of their jump take-offs occurring off their non-dominant foot (see Table 3). Despite a marked reduction in single-foot take-offs, all other position categories also recorded a higher number of jump take-offs from their non-dominant as opposed to their dominant foot when a run-up was involved. This is important to note when developing sport-specific strength and conditioning programs, while also monitoring and minimising muscle imbalances resulting from excessive loads being placed on one side of the body during training.

While multiple ruck drills are required to improve power, technique and durability, recovery from the high-impact velocity forces should also be considered.



**IMPRESSING THE DOGS:** At last year's Draft Camp, Jason Tutt caught the eye of the Western Bulldogs, who subsequently drafted him.

### CONCLUSION

This research has provided the first data on the specific game demands of Australian Football in elite junior competition, and now allows for consideration of training drills and the validity and/or appropriateness of current testing protocols.

#### THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY ARE:

- Training programs should match a player's age and related game-day requirements.
- The design of training drills should complement a position's skill requirements and movement patterns during a game.
- Field testing should be continually updated to reflect changes in game-day requirements. **CE**

**James Veale** is AFL conditioning and talent database manager and **Dr Alan Pearce** is a senior lecturer at Victoria University.

**TRAINING METHODS USING GAME-SENSE OR SKILL-BASED ACTIVITIES, APPROPRIATELY PREPARE ALL FIELD POSITIONS FOR THEIR MATCH-DAY PLAYING DEMANDS**


### 3. JUMPING AND SPRINTING DEMANDS

Field position	Jump double foot take-off	JUMP SINGLE FOOT TAKE OFF		SPRINT CHARACTERISTICS			MOVEMENT LEAD-IN INTENSITIES			
		Dominant	Non-dominant	No. of sprints	Time per effort (sec)	Distance per effort (m)	Walking	Jogging	Running	Stationary
Midfield	6	4	4	20	2.8	20.1	0	3	16	0
Wing	6	3	6	26	3.9	27.4	1	6	17	0
Ruck	5	12	56	26	3.7	26.3	1	6	13	0
HFF-HBF	15	3	5	21	3.7	25.1	1	5	16	0
CHF-CHB	12	3	7	20	3.1	22.1	1	3	14	1
FF-FB	6	1	9	17	3.4	23.7	3	2	10	1
FP-BP	3	1	4	23	3.2	23.6	1	6	15	0

*Other than time and distance measurements, figures in Tables 2 and 3 represent the mean number recorded in a match by a selected TAC Cup side in 2006.*

# The impact of good kicking

Teaching players to kick should start with the correct impact position and draw on technique, sensory feedback and emulating effective role models.

 The key to being able to kick well is to have a sound basic technique. While every player's kicking technique may be different and each player will develop a natural kicking style that feels comfortable to them, there are some critical actions that should be consistent across all players.

## Starting point – impact

Australian Football kicking experts agree that the best place to start when teaching kicking is at the point of impact.

Impact refers to the point when the player's foot makes contact with the ball. If a coach has identified that a player's kicking is flawed due to the ball not spinning backwards or having a poor flight pattern, then the first point of the kick to examine is the point of impact.

The coach should work backwards to evaluate other possible causes of the flaw. With every kicking technique and every kicking situation in a match being different, a focus on such things as grip, approach, leg swing and follow-through is not as critical as what happens at impact.

Players will learn to adapt these elements of kicking to the game situation they find themselves in. Some kicking situations in a match may mean the player does not have time to grip the ball normally, has to kick off one step, or has to produce a low flat kick that results in little follow-through. However, one thing that doesn't change with kicking technique, regardless of the environment or pressure on the player, is impact.

A player's ability to make strong, precise impact with the ball will ultimately decide if the kick reaches its intended target.

## Critical learning points

To ensure a player's impact is effective, there are three critical learning points that they must follow.

### CONTROL OF THE BALL ONTO THE FOOT

A player must be able to control the ball into the impact zone and on to their foot, striking the bottom third of the ball, to make it spin backwards (for a drop punt).

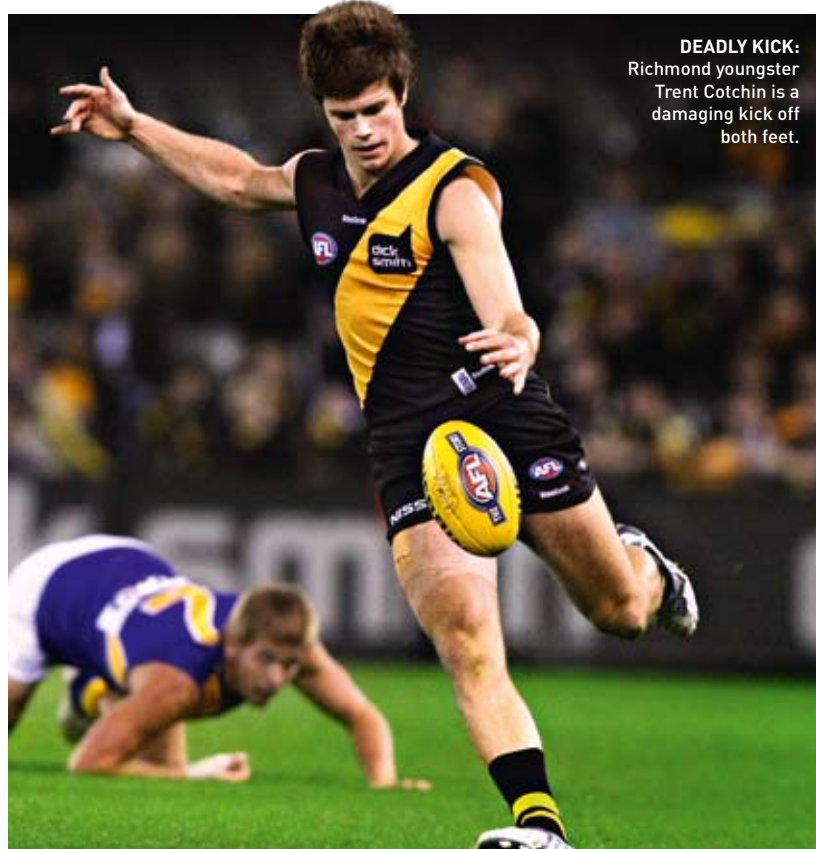
The first priority when a player is learning how to kick is teaching them to make the ball spin backwards. Once the player gains confidence and an understanding of what it feels like to get the ball to spin backwards, they can move on to other elements of the kick.

Ideally, the player guides the ball down with the guiding hand, releasing it as the kicking foot leaves the ground, giving them time to generate power. It is released from around hip level, with the guiding arm and hand controlling the path and orientation of the ball. The aim is to place the ball consistently in the individual's preferred position. During this process, the non-guiding hand comes off the front of the ball and swings up and back in an arc.

### ACCELERATION OF THE LOWER LEG

To kick the ball with penetration and distance, a player must generate a high level of lower leg speed. Lower leg speed is generated through a number of elements, including taking a steady and long last stride and trailing the kicking foot behind them. At this point, a player drives their kicking foot forward in an explosive action to make contact with the ball. A large wind-up is not needed to create an accelerated lower-leg action; however, a quick knee extension is required.

The kicking action is a very natural movement, as the thigh will decelerate to allow the lower leg to accelerate around the knee joint, so there is no need for coaches to be concerned with this sequence of movements.



**DEADLY KICK:**  
Richmond youngster Trent Cotchin is a damaging kick off both feet.

The follow-through of a kick is not of great consequence to its effectiveness – it is a part of the kicking action that flows naturally from the actions made prior to impact.

#### FIRM FOOT

A firm foot refers to the player's foot at impact. For efficient impact, the player's foot and ankle must be fully extended, so, when the foot makes contact, it presents the hardest and most stable platform.

Contact with the foot should be around the top of the laces. Contact any further down the foot will involve a less stable platform and less efficient contact, and may also result in damage to the foot if consistently repeated.

English rugby union fly half Jonny Wilkinson, who is renowned for his accurate penalty kicking, believes a firm foot is essential when kicking. In order to visualise a firm foot, he taps his foot on the ground and presses the studs of his right boot on to the hard platform of the left foot, just to remind himself of the correct part of the foot that he is about to use to kick the ball.

Another example of this is when you punch a heavy bag. You would not strike a punching bag with a weak or sloppy wrist as it would be ineffective. Kicking a football is very similar – you need to punch the ball with a firm foot for it to be effective.

#### LOOK, FEEL AND SOUND

The outcome of the kick is critical, and the way the kick looks, feels and sounds to a player is important in their learning process, as it provides vital information about their kicking action and possible improvements. There are two aspects of what a good kick should look like. The first relates to the flight of the ball. A quality kick will always spin backwards and stay vertical, ensuring the ball's flight path remains consistent. A backward-spinning ball won't always ensure the kick goes straight but it will go further and its flight path will be predictable.

Often a player's kicking action, where their kicking leg is swung around the body, will cause the ball to drift right to left for a right-footer and left to right for a left-footer.

This is natural and should not be tampered with as long as the player's kicking is effective and they understand the way their kick will move in the air. However, players with a straight leg swing may find it easier to consistently reproduce effective impact.

The second aspect of 'look' relates to the kicking action and what a good kick looks like. Players should be encouraged to visualise an effective kicking action and, at various stages in the learning process, be encouraged to 'see' the appropriate grip, run-up, the height at which the ball is dropped and other elements.

Another important sensory factor of kicking is the 'feel' of the kicking action. Players should be encouraged to feel the tension and stretch in various muscles throughout the kicking action. For example, at the point of lower leg acceleration, players should feel the tension in the muscles around their thigh.

## KEEPING IT SIMPLE

**The greatest golfer in the world today, Tiger Woods, and former Western Bulldogs great Chris Grant agree sportspeople should not obsess about technique.**

#### TIGER WOODS IN *FORTUNE* (ASIA EDITION), JULY 6, 2009

"When I was young, maybe six or seven years old, I'd play on the Navy golf course with my pop. My dad would say, "OK where do you want to hit the ball?" I'd pick a spot and say I want to hit it there. He'd shrug and say, "Fine then figure out how to do it." He didn't position my arm, adjust my feet, or change my thinking. He just said go ahead and hit the darn ball. My dad's advice to me was to simplify. Even today, when I'm struggling with my game, I can still hear him say, "Pick a spot and just hit it."

#### CHRIS GRANT TALKING TO MIKE SHEAHAN IN *HERALD SUN*, MAY 22, 2010

Grant said "experts" often complicate things by altering a player's grip, how high or low he holds the ball, whether the ball is in the right line vertically, and the player's arc as he runs in. He said a player is better off using his natural technique and kicking to a target behind the goals.

At the point of impact, the ball should feel light on the foot. The foot should be firm and absorb little shock. It shouldn't feel like you've had to kick the ball hard. Feel is extremely important when kicking and players should feel like they have middled the ball at all times. A firm foot will create a greater sweet spot and players should remember what it feels like to middle the ball and get it to spin backwards rapidly, trying to reproduce that feel every time they kick.

The sound at the point of impact should be like a thud rather than a slap. Players should be encouraged to listen for the sound on each kick and learn to associate the appropriate sound with good contact with the foot. This information can assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the kick and making any necessary modifications for the next kick.

How the kick looks, feels and sounds are inherent characteristics of the kicking action. They are important learning tools as they allow a player to practise on their own, as look, sound and feel provide immediate feedback. It is important players understand all of these characteristics.

It is the coach's responsibility to draw the player's attention to these characteristics, especially in evaluating the quality of the kicking action.

#### MODEL KICKS

Players can emulate AFL stars who are good kicks such as Lindsay Gilbee, Alan Didak, Daniel Rich, Trent Cotchin and Aaron Davey. While these players all have slightly different kicking techniques, the critical elements of kicking – controlling the ball onto the foot, lower leg acceleration and a firm foot at impact – are clearly apparent when watching all these players. Observing good players kicking is a great way to learn. **CE**

**CA PLAYER'S ABILITY TO MAKE STRONG, PRECISE IMPACT WITH THE BALL WILL ULTIMATELY DECIDE IF THE KICK REACHES ITS TARGET?**

*The article is part of the AFL's Ultimate Kicking Guide which is currently being developed by a working party made up of AFL kicking specialists.*

# 2010 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 onto our new online shop: [afl.com.au/developmentresources](http://afl.com.au/developmentresources)

## Umpiring and schools resources

The AFL online shop also allows you to access AFL umpiring and AFL schools resources: [afl.com.au/developmentresources](http://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:

[afl.com.au/news/newsarticle/tabid/208/newsid/9765/default.aspx](http://afl.com.au/news/newsarticle/tabid/208/newsid/9765/default.aspx)

## Side by Side: A Season with Collingwood

**PETER RYAN**

Journalist Peter Ryan spent the 2009 season within the inner sanctum of the Collingwood Football Club and witnessed firsthand the reality behind the headlines. Ryan takes readers on a wild ride as Collingwood chases its first premiership since 1990, revealing both the human side and inner workings of Australia's most famous sporting club. This book also provides rare insights into the coaching methods of Mick Malthouse and his team of assistants, revealing their basic values and systems.

**RRP: \$49.95 (GST incl.)**



## 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.)**

## 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.)**

## 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 primary-school-aged children.

**RRP: \$27.50 (GST incl.)**

## AFL Auskick Interactive Coaching CD ROM



This is an ideal teaching tool for coaches, teachers and parents of primary-school-aged children. It provides a range of activities and skill games for younger children.

**RRP: \$5.50 (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 individually as the star shows how it's done and explain how it's done.

**RRP: \$22.00 (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 contains valuable lessons.

**RRP: \$16.50 (GST incl.)**

## Great Skills Great Players [DVD]



The fundamentals of Australian Football are performed by some of the greats of the game in a step-by-step visual presentation demonstrating all the basic skills.

**RRP: \$10.00 (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**

## Ruck Work [DVD]

Simon Madden is recognised as one of the greatest ruckmen of all time, following his record 378 games for Essendon, a career that included two premierships. In this video, he outlines how to play this position at ruck contests and around the ground. Using Kangaroos and Carlton star Corey McKernan, Madden explains ruckwork in terms understandable for all ages and abilities.

**RRP: \$10.00 (GST incl.)**

## Kick Left, Kick Right [DVD]

Kicking is the predominant skill in Australian Football ("Kicking is King") and therefore good instruction is vital. This video, hosted by Garry Lyon, outlines key teaching points, error-detection methods and remedial activities, particularly for young players. AFL highlights are used to reinforce the importance of this skill. It features AFL greats Matthew Lloyd, Leigh Colbert, Shannon Grant and Ben Graham.

**RRP: \$10.00 (GST incl.)**

## Laws of Australian Football [DVD]

The Laws of the Game are fully explained and illustrated with video examples of the main decisions made by field umpires. There is also a focus on the rule changes and new interpretations of existing rules that were applied in 2009. This resource is used to coach umpires and educate AFL clubs.

**RRP: \$5.50 (GST incl.)**

## The 2010 National Coaching Conference Manual

The 2010 National Coaching Conference provided coaches with the latest information about coaching Australian Football, presented by some of the top coaches and specialists in the game. The program included presentations from more than 40 experts and had sections specifically aimed at high performance, all age groups and fitness coaches.

**RRP: \$5.50 (GST incl.)**

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