

CoachingEdge

VOLUME 26 No. 1 JUNE 2013 // INCORPORATING COACHING UPDATE

COACHING RUCKWORK

Finer points from
Steven King and
Ben Hudson

DREW PETRIE

Roo star's tips for
key forwards and
second ruckmen


THE SYDNEY WAY

How the Swans delivered a flag



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- A man in a red shirt is seen from the side, pointing his right arm towards a large stadium. The stadium has yellow seats and a green field. The background shows a clear sky and some distant hills.
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Introduction

Coaches at all levels will benefit from the wisdom of great clubs like the Sydney Swans and contemporary players and coaches.

In this issue of Coaching Edge we start with Nick Bowen looking at current trends in the game and speculating about where the strategies of the game could be headed.

The Sydney Swans have long been admired for maintaining a culture that drives a strong sense of team. Peter Ryan examines some of the secrets that propelled the Swans to the flag last season. With quotes from many players and the coach, Ryan focuses on the way the Swans turned their season around after a disappointing loss late in the season. Hard work, team first, honest feedback, and the identification of clear, uncomplicated roles for players are some of the pillars of their success. Many will recall the bravery of Daniel Hannebery and Adam Goodes in last season's Grand Final – such acts it appears are expected at the Swans and reveal the strength of the culture they have developed.

Contemporary players and coaches Steven King and Ben Hudson outline ruck strategies and methods of teaching ruckmen, while Drew Petrie offers some tips to improve the performance of the key forward-second ruckman.

Guidance for planning practice sessions that provide a link to specific game-plans or rectifying issues emerging in games, is advocated in an article by Danny Ryan. As well, some ideas for drills that practise specific game situations are presented.

Two former coaches, Peter Schwab and Terry Wallace, who boast a wealth of experience, share their views on principles to follow when evaluating coaches and providing guidelines for rookie coaches. Their insights provide a useful framework for coaches to assess their own performance.

Finally, as well as the regular features, there are three articles that explore some guidelines for dealing with concussion, the utilisation of latent wisdom in footy clubs, and the value of players having a vast repertoire of sporting skills.

I hope you enjoy the reading and trust that your coaching grows as a result. **CE**

Ken Davis

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// CHANGING THE GAME WHAT'S NEXT?



SWITCH IT UP: Alan Richardson believes teams will be keen to switch the ball from half-back more often.

The Sydney Swans won the 2012 premiership with their pressure and run, but will that game style stand up in 2013 as teams search for new tactics and strategies to gain a winning edge? NICK BOWEN

The AFL competition is constantly evolving. A game-plan that delivers a premiership one season is as dated as Billy Ray Cyrus' *Achy Breaky Heart* by the time the next season kicks off.

During the off-season, opposition coaches pick the premier's game style apart, looking for weaknesses they can prey on and improvements they can make.

The more lateral-minded coaches try to take the game in new directions, such as Hawthorn coach Alastair Clarkson did with his rolling zones in 2008.

So what tactical changes can we expect this season?

One thing that seems certain is coaches will have spent countless pre-season hours searching for the most efficient way through, around or over opposition defensive zones.

Port Adelaide coaching and strategy director Alan Richardson told the *AFL Record* teams might try to counteract zones by switching the ball from half-back more often than in previous seasons.

Richardson said during this year's NAB Cup, several teams' first option when pinned down by opposition zones at half-back had been to switch the ball.

"Last year, teams trying to get through the press would block the man on the mark, so their player with the ball could try to get as much territory as he could and at least get the ball to half-way," Richardson said.

"And I'm sure that will still play a pretty significant part for many teams, but on the back of early observations, it looks like teams are looking to switch the ball first and, if they can't get through, then they'll resort to that option of blocking the man on the mark.

"The density created from good zones means that you're very unlikely to be able to maintain possession on a consistent basis, so by switching to the fatter side you can stretch the zone, make them (the opposition) work and potentially get the ball out that side of the ground."

West Coast assistant coach David Teague said teams might be more prepared to risk moving the ball through the corridor this year, considering the way

teams have guarded the boundary line in recent seasons.

"Given the success of teams like Collingwood in moving the ball around the boundary line in recent seasons, more teams have moved to guard this area of the ground," Teague said.

"So you might see teams, especially early in the year, prepared to take the risk and move inside and go through the corridor.

"Doing that is obviously high-risk, high-reward, so clubs can score quickly doing it, but if they turn the ball over in the corridor they can be heavily punished too.

"Teams might be prepared to try it early and see how well it works."

Teague and Richardson agreed defensive zones meant teams had been more prepared to kick the ball long into the forward 50 in recent seasons.

Teague said teams did this partly because once they got the ball deep inside their forward line, they were well placed to lock it in there.

'YOU MIGHT SEE TEAMS, ESPECIALLY EARLY IN THE YEAR, PREPARED TO TAKE THE RISK AND MOVE INSIDE AND GO THROUGH THE CORRIDOR'

DAVID TEAGUE

"With the forward press mentality of teams, they know the easiest place to press is once you get it deep in your forward line, the narrowest part of the ground," Teague said.

"So, if you can get it in there quickly and if you can get players in there who can put that pressure on, the quick forwards, they give the rest of the team time to get down and get that forward press going."

Richardson said teams such as the Sydney Swans and St Kilda had started to do this with forward lines built around three or four quick small forwards.

"They (the Swans) used those really good, hard runners to play that up-and-back, up-and-back type of footy," he said.

"That way they were able to clog up the opposition and then make it a foot race, obviously with guys like Lewis Jetta going back the other way.

"We played St Kilda in round one of the NAB Cup and the speed they have in the front half with players like Ahmed Saad was a real concern for us, and I think it will be for many teams.

"They get the ball over the back and let the little blokes run on to it."

Richardson said teams might look to counter this tactic by stationing a "wicketkeeper" deep in defensive 50 to guard open space.

North Melbourne senior assistant coach Darren Crocker said more teams had been prepared recently to kick long to tall targets and get numbers to the fall of the ball.

Teague, Richardson and Crocker agreed teams would have to strike a forward line balance between having marking targets they could kick to under pressure and players capable of applying pressure when the ball hit the ground.

West Coast regularly fielded one of the tallest forward lines in the competition last year, playing two of Jack Darling, Quinten Lynch and Josh Kennedy, alongside a resting ruckman, Dean Cox or Nic Naitanui.

The Eagles had considerable success with the tall structure, as did North Melbourne in the second half of the season with an attack centred around key forwards Drew Petrie, Lachlan Hansen and Robbie Tarrant.

But Teague said teams looking to go tall in attack had to have players capable of applying defensive pressure as well.

Teague cited the Swans as an example, saying they had often stacked their forward line last year with Lewis Roberts-Thomson, Adam Goodes, Sam Reid and one of their ruckmen, Mike Pyke or Shane Mumford, but were still one of the competition's best exponents of forward pressure.

"They had some really tall players but still had the ability to get that pressure on; 'LRT' (Roberts-Thomson) and Goodes in particular are very mobile," Teague said.

"So, I think each club will look at their list and see what best suits them.

"No doubt they'll want the tall targets if it's a pressurised game and you've got to kick to a contest.

"But you want the ability that once it hits the ground, you can keep it in there as long as possible."

As for defensive strategies teams might employ this season, Richardson said few teams had played a seventh defender or loose man in defence last season, but he had noticed several teams employing it in the NAB Cup.

'LAST YEAR, YOU SAW KEY MIDFIELDERS LIKE JOSH KENNEDY AND JOBE WATSON PLAYING OUT OF THE GOALSQUARE AT TIMES, AS OPPOSED TO HAVING THEM COME OFF THE GROUND'

ALAN RICHARDSON

"Initially that player is there to support the defence, but they very quickly get involved in offence when the opportunity presents," Richardson said.

Crocker said teams might decide to play a loose man in defence late in games when fatigue meant they struggled to maintain their defensive set-ups.

"That way, if the opposition does get through your set-ups up the ground, you've got that spare defender out the back as a last line of defence who can come up and defend," he said.

Richardson said teams would also ask their players to be more versatile this season, with a view to resting less often on the interchange bench and more often in a different position.

"In terms of rotations, teams are definitely

talking to their players and you can see by the positions and the number of positions that players are playing in any one game that they're going to need to be versatile," Richardson said.

"Last year, you saw key midfielders like Josh Kennedy and Jobe Watson playing out of the goalsquare at times, as opposed to having them come off the ground.

"And that was when we had unlimited rotations. In the NAB Cup games that had caps on rotations, you certainly saw players stay on the ground and change positions.

"Even in the home and away season – especially next season when the interchange cap comes in – you're not going to be able to play extended time in the midfield.

"But that doesn't mean you'll come off the ground. Most often these midfielders will have to go forward." **CE**

This article appeared in the round one edition of the *AFL Record*.



VERSATILE: Jobe Watson can push forward and play out of the goalsquare.

THE SYDNEY WAY

There is no secret to Sydney's success – just a simple, hard-working, team-first philosophy that has been drummed into the players over many years.

BY PETER RYAN



WE DID IT: Sydney co-captain Jarrad McVeigh shows his emotions after last year's classic Grand Final encounter against Hawthorn.

Just 15 minutes after the siren signaled the end of his 2012 home and away season, Sydney Swans skipper Jarrad McVeigh marshalled his teammates into the corner of the visitors' rooms at Geelong's Simonds Stadium for a quick chat.

The Swans had just suffered their third loss in four games, and would finish third on the ladder.

It meant the club would face Adelaide in a qualifying final on the road in the first week of the finals, having dropped from top spot in the final two games. To outsiders, Sydney's campaign looked to be teetering.

The players leaned in to hear McVeigh's message. It was simple and direct.

"He just reassured us that if we brought our A-game, played with each other and played the way we wanted to play, then we were a good side," young midfielder Daniel Hannebery said.

A similar message was repeated when coach John Longmire and McVeigh fronted the media moments later. The Swans' form was reasonable; they had to improve their ball movement and felt, at their best, they could beat anyone. But their only focus from this point on would be beating the Crows.

Many saw the post-match words as the necessary glass half-full approach to take at the time, yet in hindsight, the measured approach can be seen as an example of the Sydney process at work.



Reflecting on his leaders' capacity to refocus the group with some well-chosen words, Longmire said it was their capacity to act on what they said that characterised them as quality leaders.

"Macca' (McVeigh) and a large number of our senior players were able to do that at times when it mattered and importantly back it up with actions and not just words," he said.

"It's one thing to be able to identify it and talk about it and it's another to be able to actually deliver it and make sure you get your actions right."

A week later, the Swans were in a preliminary final after defeating the Crows by

29 points. At the end of the month, Sydney was premier, having prevailed over Hawthorn in a classic Grand Final.

How did the Swans achieve what few outsiders expected them to achieve at the start of the finals?

"There's no secret to it," said Longmire, a premiership coach after just two seasons as the main man. "It's just about trying to keep working hard. We're not perfect."

The mindset that appears to be ingrained in the Swans is a willingness to do what needs to be done in order to get better.

"We try to make sure that little things on-field and little things off-field are all picked up on as soon as we feel we're drifting slightly," premiership defender Ted Richards said.

That's easier, of course, to say than do.

For the coach, it means having a philosophy to turn to under pressure. It means keeping the message simple and being clear about the key indicators that result in wins and losses.

After the loss to the Cats, Sydney tweaked its ball movement methods slightly, re-introduced Nick Smith and Ben Reid into the team, gambled on Mitch Morton and went into the finals with everyone prepared to play their role.

Knowing what is expected is a big part of the Swans' consistent performances.

The coach likes to remind himself that basic is best and he keeps breaking things down to ensure the players' jobs are not overcomplicated.

Along with hard work, it seems to be the reason why so many players who arrive at the club get better.

Look at the premiership team: Richards, Martin Mattner, Rhyce Shaw, Morton, Shane Mumford and Josh Kennedy came to the Swans seeking more opportunities. Only Mumford was seen at the time as a big loss for his former club (Geelong), although all were considered by their clubs to be good characters.

All are now admired for what they have achieved at Sydney.

When Richards was asked if Sydney has some magical formula for transforming cast-offs, he responded without hesitation.

"Quite the opposite. No one comes here thinking something magical is going to happen," he said.

"Everyone who has come here from another club really appreciates the second chance and knows there may not be a third.

"Everyone who comes from another club has come here with a great attitude, willing to

work hard and willing to buy into the culture and earn the respect of their teammates."

The hard-working, team-first philosophy has been drummed into the players over many years, at least since Paul Roos, Stuart Maxfield and Leading Teams began to drive a cultural renaissance at the club.

Each player is given a role to play and is expected to perform it: nothing more; nothing less.

That's why a player such as Canadian Mike Pyke, a football novice, can develop into a valuable player.

Even though Pyke had the competitive nature and the capacity to pick up new concepts, he also had coaches who recognised his limitations.

That wasn't easy. It required a change in instincts from all parties.

One day at training, Longmire told Pyke after an errant kick to stop thinking he was Darren Jarman, the brilliant former Hawk and Crow. Longmire soon realised the name Jarman, let alone his kicking ability, was not familiar to Pyke.

So the coaches found other ways to communicate to Pyke and eventually he starred in a premiership win.

The players also have a communication system among themselves and the rest of the club that focuses on certain standards and expectations.

Morton revealed it was a mid-season chat with a senior player that turned his career around in 2012, and led to him performing the role he was expected to play when he kicked two goals in the Grand Final.

The mystery for other clubs is how the Swans have managed to keep the culture alive through generations.

Since the seminal period when Maxfield was captain, Barry Hall, Brett Kirk, Leo Barry, Craig Bolton, Adam Goodes, McVeigh, and now, Kieren Jack, have led the club. »

'IT'S JUST ABOUT TRYING TO KEEP WORKING HARD'

COACH JOHN LONGMIRE

CLOSE KNIT: Swans Adam Goodes, Daniel Hannebery and Craig Bird stand proud after prevailing over Hawthorn in a classic Grand Final.



Having co-captains allows a succession plan to be implemented quickly.

It might be one reason that as the leadership group regenerates, the values stay the same.

No one is spared when words are required and no one is entitled to go into self-preservation mode, either.

Perhaps that's another reason why the club has stayed sharp and in contention over time.

Hearing McVeigh say on the eve of the season that high-priced recruit Kurt Tippett would have to earn a game, just like everyone else on the list, when he returned from suspension was a reminder of what the club's about.

No one gets a game as a gift. No poor effort is swept under the carpet. Nothing is overlooked. No one is considered to be outside the system.

"When you go into the footy club, you are expected to play and train a certain way and it doesn't matter if you have played one game or just come to the club or played 200 games, you are expected to conduct yourselves in a certain way," Hannebery said.

"Blokes who fall away from that get told to get back on the right path and that is a pretty straight-forward system we have. There's no secret, nothing special."

Each player is expected to pass on his experiences to others via a mentoring system.

This is important because empathy is needed when standards are being ruthlessly driven, particularly for those new to the club.

'IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU HAVE PLAYED ONE GAME OR JUST COME TO THE CLUB OR PLAYED 200 GAMES, YOU ARE EXPECTED TO CONDUCT YOURSELVES IN A CERTAIN WAY'

DANIEL HANNEBERY

When Richards joined the Swans, his mentor was Bolton, the 2005 premiership full-back.

Bolton had joined Sydney after limited opportunities with the Brisbane Lions. Richards was in awe of him and wanted to emulate his role as a premiership player. He did so last year and says the mentoring system remains important.

"There's ongoing discussion and reviews of how training is going and how they (new players) are handling things," Richards said.

"You want new guys to forge good relationships with teammates and to really fast-track their opportunities to push into the team."



GRAND FINAL STAR:
Canadian-born Mike Pyke
played the game of his
life in the Grand Final.

It is not always easy for the young players at Sydney. They play for the Swans in the NEAFL competition if they are not playing at AFL level. The gap is huge and with a resilient list – the Swans used only 31 players at AFL level last season – how to keep the younger players satisfied and developing with purpose remains an ongoing challenge.

As is maintaining a culture of continuous improvement, a characteristic that has helped the club win universal respect.

"We are fully aware that it is a very hard thing to get going but a very easy thing to lose quickly," Richards said. "We're constantly aware of that."

Hannebery found out how that system of feedback operated a few pre-seasons back when he returned in worse shape than he should have and then broke his cheekbone jumping a fence over Christmas.

His teammates let him know he wasn't performing in a way that would enable him to be at his best. That meant he was letting them down – and letting himself down.

Now he's famous for his performance in last year's Grand Final and, in particular, the courageous chest mark he took backing into traffic in the first half.

"The mark wasn't really anything special," Hannebery said. "I suppose what magnified it was that (Hawthorn ruckman David) Hale collected me at the right time."

Hannebery emphasised that any of his teammates would have done the same thing if caught in the same position.

"It is expected of us," he said.

Teammates shrugged in admiration at the heroics of Goodes in the Grand Final when he kept playing after suffering a posterior cruciate ligament injury. Richards played with a dodgy ankle.

Longmire knows there is no chance for the club to rest on its laurels.

Although he hopes the players have gained a belief from their finals efforts, he knows past performances mean little this season.

"The moment you stop that quest for improvement is the moment you give it up and start to do something else because it's a very demanding industry," he said.

Such humility allows players to remember what put them into contention in the first place.

"We can't ever just sit back and relax," Longmire said. "You need to keep trying to improve all the time in every aspect of what we do."

That approach didn't stop the club making time to celebrate its 2012 achievements. That's the beauty of sport and why once the relief subsided, Longmire was able to see the win for what it was.

"You do have moments of self-reflection," he said. "You need to enjoy it for what it is because it's very difficult to do."

Hannebery said the five minutes when the football department and the players gathered after the game were special.

"We talked about different moments of the game and all had a laugh and 'Horse' (Longmire) had a few words to say," he said.

"It was a great time to reflect on the game and the year. It was pretty emotional and a special time."

It is what football is all about, a moment to make 2006, when the Swans lost the Grand Final to West Coast, fade into the background for players such as Richards and McVeigh.

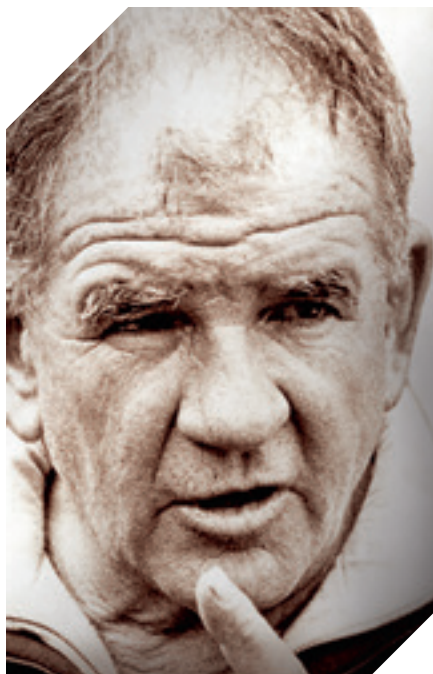
"At the time, the loss played on my mind a bit, but now I don't really care about it," McVeigh said.

His post-game talk in Geelong came when hope remained, but doubt so easily could have taken hold.

At that time, he had played in one Grand Final for one loss. Now he is a premiership player. And he will watch with pride as the premiership flag is raised pre-game this weekend. **CE**

This article appeared in the round one edition of the *AFL Record*.

FROM THE IVORY TOWER AND BEYOND



NO BEATING AROUND:
Rugby league coaching
legend Jack Gibson spoke
powerfully and was
straight to the point.

In this regular section **Ken Davis** looks at relevant articles or research from sport science and coaching. In the most recent editions the biographies of coaches have been researched to outline some of the qualities of coaches who have been at the forefront of their respective sports. A biography about legendary rugby league coach Jack Gibson has been examined by a student, **Layal Tannous**, in a coaching course conducted at ACU.

DON'T JUST SPEAK, SAY SOMETHING

Wayne Bennett said about Jack Gibson: "There are some who believe that to motivate people you have to make a half-hour speech. But you don't, and Jack always understood that. He didn't make great speeches, but what he said he meant, and it cut right to the bone."

EDITOR'S NOTE

When the coach knows so much more than the players in the team it is tempting to want to talk a lot so that they become more "savvy" about the game. Most coaches experience this when they take on a job. However, if the players are not listening it is self-defeating and can lead to more frustration as they continue to make the same mistakes. Coaches have to be aware of the need to educate, but must be mindful that at all levels most players want to play. So the advice is to deliver meaningful, varied and concise educative messages to players and get on with the playing.

TAKE THE EXTRA STEPS TO KNOW THE PLAYERS

One of Gibson's players, Michael Cronin, said that he sought information about each player and presented each of them with a book in which he had written a quote he believed was applicable to the recipient.

EDITOR'S NOTE

A small but unique way of treating each player as an individual. Any coach delivering such a message to each player at the start of his coaching tenure is showing that player that he respects his uniqueness.

RISK-TAKING

According to legendary coach and media commentator Alan Jones, Gibson never allowed anyone to enter the comfort zone. "He taught young people that great achievements involve great risk. That's why his teams were regarded as among the best attacking sides in history," Jones says.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In light of these comments, it is interesting to reflect on the AFL coaching career of Matthew Knights. Knights implored a young Essendon team to take the game on and attack the opposition with "run and carry". Of course, with imperfect skills, that game plan came undone many times and – to the outside observer – led to Knights' demise as Essendon coach. The Bombers under him were seen as too attacking and were often cut up on the rebound by more skilful sides. When James Hird took over he was wise to say that he thought the defensive side of the Essendon game needed to be developed for it to be a top side.

As the players have matured they seem to have improved their skills and perhaps the foundation for their developing success may have come in part from the work that Knights did on their offensive style. The plan built on taking risks and enjoying their positive footy initially, may have been the right grounding for the group. It was appropriate then to focus more keenly on defensive structures to complement their highly developed offensive game. In this instance it appears the Dons have added on their defensive skills rather than replacing an offensive mindset with a defensive one.

Ross Lyon has done a similar thing at St Kilda and now Fremantle. Initially Lyon was roundly criticised for his defensive mindset at St Kilda, but surely he was vindicated in the end with three Grand final appearances. At first players seemed to struggle, but the outcomes improved rapidly given time to adopt the defensive structures. Perhaps also it involved a balance of offence and defence that ultimately enabled the team to reach consistently high levels of performance. It will be interesting to follow the path of Fremantle in subsequent games in their journey under Lyon's tutelage.

I suspect Jack Gibson would be advising coaches to unleash their attacking instincts again while adding on defensive lessons. To do that skills need to be improved or players replaced. That takes time. Remember Damien Hardwick started his coaching tenure at Richmond with eight consecutive losses. And if that doesn't convince you, according to folklore, Rome wasn't built in a day!

CALM, POSITIVE THINKING

Gibson said: "For a coach to raise his voice to his players is to admit he's lost it. It's a sign of panic – and that's contagious. A coach has to explain to his players that they can accomplish something, that it's going to get tough out there and that they're going to get frightened, but that they have to react positively to all that. A coach must have confidence. I never had a team that I didn't think would win the football game. Sometimes, though, I did have to have a 'rethink' later."

EDITOR'S NOTE

I understand what Gibson is getting at here, as sometimes coaches lose it when they raise their voice and yell at players. However, a skilful coach can still use variation in tone and power in his voice to motivate players to listen and react to the intensity of delivery. A coach can exude passion through his voice that can transfer to the players and motivate them to want to succeed more than if they relied entirely on their own strategies.

I like the concept that a coach must always believe his side can win and have a plan that can convince the players that an upset to the form line is possible if they follow that plan. Engendering a positive approach in times when you fear failure is a powerful mechanism for players to employ.

OMITTING PLAYERS FROM THE TEAM

Gibson said: "When I had to cut a player I had to be direct with him ... 'I'm not using you this week, but if you are smart enough you'll get your position back.' They might not accept it straight away, but the smart ones, when they go home and think about it, then they will ... If I ever dropped a bloke who had a history of being a pretty good player I made sure that I didn't put a mug in his place. I had to put a tough individual in his place. I owed the dropped player that."

EDITOR'S NOTE

An interesting way to approach a dropped player by appealing to their smarts. That immediately puts the onus on the player and appeals to their ego. The last point is one I have never considered, but it certainly has merit. Clearly if you replace a player with a weaker one you are only going to hose the negativity of the omitted player if the replacement doesn't perform.

EXCUSES AND PREVIOUS SUCCESS

Gibson had an interesting approach to players with lame excuses for not attending training.

He told of one player who offered an excuse he had not heard before for missing training. "Oh, my sister had a baby," the player said. Gibson said he "didn't know whether he helped with the delivery, but I gave him the rest of the season off to help look after it."

On previous success, Gibson told his players to "bring along your scrapbooks next week for the barbecue ... we need some fuel. Past successes won't count ... it's what you do this year."

EDITOR'S NOTE

The first penalty sounds a little harsh to me, but in a professional team perhaps some penalty is justified. What Gibson is saying is that if you are not needed at a delivery of a baby then perhaps your excuse is a bit lame and you should incur a penalty for not attending a compulsory training session.

The point about previous success, while understandable, is not completely fair in my opinion. If, for example, Scott Pendlebury turns up for Collingwood training in the new season it would be foolish not to take his impeccable record in performance and commitment into account if he transgressed in any area in that new season. Say, for instance, that he did not show the courage required in a contest. Surely the coach would be easy on him considering that, in many years of playing the game, his courage had never been questioned. Sure, all players should be looking to improve, but those who have built up the credits should perhaps be treated more leniently than those who haven't. **CE**



CLEAN AIR AND OPEN MINDS

BY KEN DAVIS

BRENDON GODDARD:
Teeing off in a broad range
of sports.

Playing a broad range of sports has great advantages, especially for the young – and variation can be beneficial for senior footballers too.

The upbringing of AFL players can impact the way they prepare and play their sport. Many players from country areas have had a broad range of sporting experiences that I think have been beneficial in the way they approach football.

I once played cricket with the highly talented and multi-skilled Chris Lynch – now an AFL Commissioner – and he told me that his typical winter weekend, growing up in Broken Hill, involved playing basketball, tennis, baseball and football. Lynch eventually played football for Geelong, but his background gave him an array of skills that ensured he could adapt readily to any situation in any sport.

Of course, it could be argued that lack of specialisation in one sport may have hindered his progress as an AFL footballer – or as an elite cricketer or baseballer. When this argument is made it seems logical that the earlier and more a person specialises the better their skills should be. However, the potential benefits of playing other sports often are not considered.

I also worked at Geelong Football Club with Garry Hocking, a superstar who had played every sport on offer when growing up in Cobram. Hocking was a very good tennis player, golfer and cricketer in his youth. I can still see him wicketkeeping in a game of indoor cricket we had for some variety at Geelong. He was a “gun”. He had wonderful game sense and was a very smart player.

He also was very skilful at footy, so he hadn't lost out there. When he decided to concentrate on footy he practised diligently and became one of the most skilful players of his era. I always thought his game smarts could have been due to the breadth of his childhood sporting experiences. He had learnt to compete in a range of situations and sports.

Jimmy Bartel, Luke Hodge, Brett Deledio and Jonathan Brown are among the many other country boys who were outstanding junior cricketers.

We hear quite often now of coaches turning to other sports to “grow” their game. Rugby players are brought in to teach tackling to AFL players, and conversely AFL players are teaching rugby players to kick and catch the ball more effectively. Patterns of play have been borrowed from soccer, with the switching of play and passing backwards – often in the back half – to set up an attacking move a notable, if at times frustrating to some, example.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN PLAYING AND WATCHING OTHER SPORTS

As a former physical education teacher and player of many sports, I think I have a sound foundation from which to offer some ideas on how footballers can learn from other sports. I encourage coaches to look outside their sport for ways to improve performance. Here are my thoughts on three other sports.



GOLF

The commitment of elite golfers to hone their skills is astounding. Players such as Vijay Singh hit 1000 golf balls a day on the driving range. Top tournament golfers hit many balls before playing for four hours, then return to the practice fairway to work on things that perhaps weren't quite right during that round. That often means up to six hours a day hitting balls.

The skill in football that most replicates hitting a golf ball is goalkicking, but how many shots at goal do footballers have at practice? Twenty? Thirty? Certainly many less than golfers have practice shots – and therein may

lie the problem with goalkicking. Indications are that no significant improvement has been made in goalkicking as the game has become more professional. Of course, the physical load on the kicking muscles may be more demanding than swinging a golf club. However, better-conditioned footballers may well develop muscles in their kicking legs that could endure more skill practice.

The meticulous attention of golfers to consistent routines is geared towards creating consistency in performance and has been adapted by footballers kicking for goal. Some of the best goalkickers, such as Matthew Lloyd, have embraced the concept. Lloyd became one of the best finishers in the modern era. Skill, yes, but consistency of preparation too.

We also can learn from the focus of golfers. The eye control of elite golfers when putting or driving is superb. They seem oblivious to their surrounds, their eyes focused on the line they want to hit or putt. Footballers scan their environment to see if a teammate is in better position to shoot for goal, but I worry about players whose eyes are continually flitting as they prepare to take a shot for goal. They need to make up their mind that it is their time to kick a goal and maintain the eye control of a Tiger Woods lining up a putt – and perhaps the ball will go through the big sticks more often.





BASKETBALL

I can recall Malcolm Blight when coaching at Geelong banning players from playing basketball in the off-season. Blight made several salient points, including that basketball players often take off from both feet and he was worried that footballers may start doing it, to their detriment, in marking contests. Perhaps, but playing basketball also can have positives for footballers.

For instance, passing a ball in traffic in basketball requires tracking the path of teammates and opposition players and judging the right position to put the ball so that a teammate runs on to it without breaking stride. The dexterity in evading players in basketball while driving to the hoop is a skill that equates to a footballer running through congestion like Chris Judd.

The ability of basketballers to instantly change to a defensive mindset after scoring a goal is an attribute I encourage footballers to develop. As soon as basketballers hit the boards after dunking a basket they look and move to defend. Footballers typically take more time to commit to chasing when a turnover occurs. Rarely do footballers defend as quickly as basketballers. Defensive pressure is becoming more important in football as players continue to perfect their disposal skills, so instant action is required when a turnover occurs.



TENNIS

A critical part of individual combative sports such as tennis is working out an opponent's strengths and weaknesses. This occurs in football too, but not to the same extent. In tennis, if the opponent is a baseliner the aim is to bring them to the net. If their backhand is their weaker side it should be exploited by pressuring that stroke. If the opponent has a weak second serve the player can stand closer and be ready to run around it and crunch a forehand.

'YOUNG PLAYERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO PLAY OTHER SPORTS SO THAT THEY ACQUIRE A BROAD RANGE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SKILLS AND STRATEGIES'

In football, a player should run as much as possible against a slow, bigger opponent to provide a leading target. An opponent with poor disposal skills on their "wrong" side should be corralled by blocking their path to the preferred side. Opponents with poor endurance should be run and run and run!

The way top tennis players dissect and exploit weaknesses in every opponent is a great example for football players and coaches.

Tennis players also are skilled at using space effectively. They create space by moving an opponent wide and then directing their next shot into the space created on the other side of the court. This concept is important in football too, with players coaxing opponents out of crowded areas by leading to the side and creating space for others to lead into and accept a pass from a teammate.

Probably the most important aspect to watch and learn from tennis though is to follow momentum shifts in points. Top tennis players seem to capitalise when momentum is with them by maintaining the pressure on their opponent.

For example, when an opponent is scurrying for a ball hit wide of the court a momentum-grabber comes to the net to take the ball early and hit it into the open court. In a more conservative approach the player pushes the ball back safely, but in doing so allows the pressured opponent to get back on a level footing in the point.

Once a player has momentum they have to attack and maintain it. When a player is on top of an opponent in football they have to maintain their approach and "go for the jugular".

Holding a lead is often used at this time, but that falls into the face of momentum maintenance. Conversely, if the player or team don't have momentum they should change

'I ENCOURAGE COACHES TO LOOK OUTSIDE THEIR SPORT FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE'

the pace of the game. Slow it up if it has been played at break-neck speed; quicken it up if it has been played slowly.

I know teams have their reasons for interchanging players after they kick goals, but I don't support the concept. It means taking off a player who has momentum and confidence to win the next contest. I'd prefer to keep that player on and capitalise on the momentum.

I'm sure coaches who have been involved with other sports will have many more examples. In the next issue I will investigate other sports and see how playing them could benefit AFL players.

All coaches should be encouraged to explore other sports to seek alternative ways to improve their coaching and ultimately their team's performance. Young players should be encouraged to play other sports so that they acquire a broad range of physical and mental skills and strategies. We need to open our minds and not be so restricted by the possibility of injury. Injuries may happen playing basketball, but they can just as easily occur playing football. By all means do everything possible to prevent injuries, but value the education and skill development gained from participation in other sports that can ultimately enhance the player's ability to play and cope with the rigours of football at the highest level. **CE**



SHOOTING FROM DOWNTOWN: North Melbourne star Daniel Wells shows his basketball prowess.



SAFETY-FIRST:
Coaches should be aware if a player is showing signs of concussion.

CONCUSSION

WHAT'S EXPECTED OF A COACH?

BY LAWRIE WOODMAN
AFL COACHING MANAGER

Concussion is a mild brain injury, caused by trauma that results in temporary dysfunction of the brain. When it occurs, a player may experience symptoms and temporary loss of some brain skills such as memory and thinking abilities. It is vital that coaches be aware of signs of concussion, which often are subtle.

The core content of this article is based on recommendations of the AFL Concussion Working Group and the AFL Medical Officers Association.

For further information see 'The Management of concussion in Australian Football' and visit : aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=66

Management guidelines

One of a coach's major responsibilities is a duty of care towards players in the team and their safety. This duty is highlighted when players receive a knock to the head and suffer a concussive injury.

In the best-practice management of concussion in football, the critical element is the welfare of the player in the short and long term. These guidelines should be adhered to at all times.

1 RECOGNISING THE INJURY

Some of the possible symptoms

- » Headache
- » Nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain
- » Dizziness
- » Altered, blurred or lost vision
- » Fatigue
- » Ringing in the ears
- » Memory disturbance
- » Loss of consciousness

Some of the signs

- » Loss of balance
- » Irritability
- » Pale complexion
- » Poor concentration
- » Slow or altered verbal skills
- » Inappropriate behaviour
- » Mental confusion and memory loss
- » Not feeling normal

A coach should be mindful of the possibility of concussion if a player is not feeling their usual self.

2 REMOVAL FROM THE GAME

Any player with a suspected concussion must be immediately removed from the game. This allows the first aid provider or medical support staff time and space to assess a player properly. Generally, initial decisions in this area in community football will be made by the head trainer, unless the club has a medical doctor in attendance.

Trainers should not be swayed by the opinions of coaches, players, or others suggesting a premature return to play. Conversely, coaches – in accordance with the AFL Coaches Code of Conduct – must not put undue pressure on trainers or players to make such decisions.

A player with suspected concussion must be withdrawn from playing or training until fully evaluated by a medical practitioner and cleared to play. They must not be allowed to return to the game or practice session.

3 MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

All players with concussion or suspected concussion need an urgent assessment by a registered medical doctor. This assessment can be done by a doctor at the venue, local general practice or hospital emergency department.

Players with suspected concussion, having been removed from the field, should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.

Refer the player immediately to hospital if:

- » There is any concern regarding the risk of a structural head or neck injury, or;
- » A player deteriorates after the injury – for example, increased drowsiness, headache or vomiting.

4 RETURNING TO PLAY

It is important that concussion is managed correctly and that players do not return to play or training until they are fully recovered. It is critical that the basic principles of return-to-play decisions are followed.

A concussed player must not be allowed to return to play before having a medical clearance.

Decisions on a return to play after a concussive injury should only be made by a medical officer with experience in concussive injuries.

Players should return to play in graded fashion, following a step-wise concussion rehabilitation program, supervised by the treating medical practitioner.

Steps coaches should take

- » Coach players to play within the spirit of the game and understand their duty of care to other participants, particularly regarding the Laws of the Game, which have been designed to improve the safety of players – including protecting their heads.
- » Ensure the club has supplies of the AFL's concussion management resources – brochures, Concussion Recognition Tool (CRT) cards, clubroom posters, player and parent handouts.
- » Be familiar with the AFL Concussion Management Guidelines, including signs and symptoms which suggest a concussion or possible concussion, so that these guidelines are followed and their use becomes second nature in decision-making.
- » Ensure that the team manager, assistant coaches and medical support staff, trainers and first-aiders all have the same understanding and will act in accordance with the guidelines.
- » Ensure that the medical support staff, trainers and first-aiders have CRT cards and practise using them.
- » Display the AFL Concussion Management poster in your clubrooms.
- » Ensure players and parents are aware of the issues surrounding concussion – for example through:
 - » Pre-season orientation/team meetings.
 - » Providing handouts about recognising and managing concussion.
- » Have parent/player handouts handy on match day so they can be given to a parent or person who is with a player with concussion or suspected of having concussion, or to the player.

ROLE OF HELMETS AND MOUTHGUARDS IN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

Helmets

- » There is no definitive scientific evidence that helmets prevent concussion or other brain injuries in Australian Football.
- » There is some evidence that younger players who wear a helmet may change their playing style, and receive more head impacts as a result. Accordingly, helmets are not recommended for the prevention of concussion.
- » Helmets may have a role in the protection of players on return to play following specific injuries (e.g. face or skull fractures).

Mouthguards

- » Mouthguards have a definite role in preventing injuries to the teeth and face and for this reason they are strongly recommended at all levels of football.
- » Dentally fitted laminated mouthguards offer the best protection. 'Boil and bite' type mouthguards are not recommended for any level of play as they can dislodge during play and block the airway.
- » There is no definitive scientific evidence that mouthguards prevent concussion or other brain injuries in Australian Football.

This section is a position statement by the AFL on the role of helmets and mouthguards in Australian Football. It is based on advice provided by the AFL Concussion Working Group and AFL Medical Officers' Association. – July, 2012

POCKET CONCUSSION RECOGNITION TOOL



To help identify concussion in children, youth and adults

RECOGNISE & REMOVE

Concussion should be suspected **if one or more** of the following visible clues, signs, symptoms or errors in memory questions are present.

1. Visible clues of suspected concussion

Any one or more of the following visual clues can indicate a possible concussion:

- » Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- » Lying motionless on ground /slow to get up
- » Unsteady on feet /balance problems or falling over/ incoordination
- » Grabbing/clutching of head
- » Dazed, blank or vacant look
- » Confused/not aware of plays or events

2. Signs and symptoms of suspected concussion

Presence of any one or more of the following signs and symptoms may suggest a concussion:

- » Loss of consciousness
- » Headache
- » Seizure or convulsion
- » Dizziness
- » Balance problems
- » Confusion
- » Nausea or vomiting
- » Feeling slowed down
- » Drowsiness
- » "Pressure in head"
- » More emotional
- » Blurred vision
- » Irritability
- » Sensitivity to light

- » Sadness
- » Amnesia
- » Fatigue or low energy
- » Feeling like "in a fog"
- » Nervous or anxious
- » Neck pain
- » "Don't feel right"
- » Sensitivity to noise
- » Difficulty remembering
- » Difficulty concentrating

3. Memory function

Failure to answer any of these questions correctly may suggest a concussion.

- » "What venue are we at today?"
- » "Which half is it now?"
- » "Who scored last in this game?"
- » "What team did you play last week/game?"
- » "Did your team win the last game?"

Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY, and should not be returned to activity until they are assessed medically. Athletes with a suspected concussion should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.

It is recommended that, in all cases of suspected concussion, the player is referred to a medical professional for diagnosis and guidance as well as return to play decisions, even if the symptoms resolve.

RED FLAGS

If **ANY** of the following are reported then the player should be safely and immediately removed from the field. If no qualified medical professional is available, consider transporting by ambulance for urgent medical assessment:

- » Athlete complains of neck pain
- » Deteriorating conscious state
- » Increasing confusion or irritability
- » Severe or increasing headache
- » Repeated vomiting
- » Unusual behaviour change
- » Seizure or convulsion
- » Double vision
- » Weakness or tingling/ burning in arms or legs

REMEMBER

- » In all cases, the basic principles of first aid (danger, response, airway, breathing, circulation) should be followed.
- » Do not attempt to move the player (other than required for airway support) unless trained to do so.
- » Do not remove helmet (if present) unless trained to do so.

from McCrory et. al, Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport. Br J Sports Med 47 (5), 2013
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RUCK DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

BY STEVEN KING

SESSION ONE

Strengths and Weaknesses

SESSION AIMS

Players to discover and have an understanding of what type of ruckman they are and their specific strengths and weaknesses.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

A whiteboard and marker and some seats for the players (this is a chalk-and-talk session).

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Getting each ruckman to identify their preferences and styles at centre bounces (CBs), boundary throw-ins (BTs) and ball-ups; which leg they prefer to jump off; which hand they prefer to hit the ball with and whether they are predominantly jumpers or body players. On the whiteboard I drew up a centre circle and got each ruckman to mark their preferred angle and preferred hit spots.

KEY COACHING POINTS

To give the players an understanding of

- » Knowing what type of ruckman they are and trying to play to their strengths.
- » Getting as many contests played on their terms as possible.
- » Giving them areas to work on and develop.

SESSION TWO

Centre Bounces

SESSION AIMS

To run through basic centre-bounce work, practising different styles and options of ruckwork. Players to work on their techniques using both hands to palm the ball and jumping off both legs into the ruckbag.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

A ruckbag, and a couple of footballs. The use of another coach to assist in holding the ruckbag or throwing up the ball would be useful.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Making sure the players are warmed up, the first activity is to use the centre-bounce circle and throw up the ball, getting the players to jump at it and palm it at its highest point to their preferred target areas.

The second drill is to hold the ruckbag and get the players to jump high into it, getting used to making strong contact with the bag and using it for leverage.

The third drill is to combine the first two drills, getting the players to jump high into the bag and palm the ball into designated areas.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- » Always watch the ball.
- » Jump fractionally early, using the bag for extra height.
- » Use soft hands (to palm the ball down easily for the midfielders).

SESSION THREE

Boundary Throw-Ins and Ball-Ups

SESSION AIMS

To work on and practice different techniques and styles of boundary throw-in and ball-up work. Concentrating mainly on body work, protecting the ball's drop zone while palming it at its highest point.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Footballs.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The first activity is players in pairs competing against each other using mock pressure. Take in turns of winning the hit-out.

Boundary throw-ins – first activity is for players to win front spot, keeping front spot under pressure and palming the ball. Then swap with partner.

Second activity is for the player to hold their spot behind, protecting the drop zone of the ball, palming to a designated spot, then swapping with their partner.

Ball ups – using mock pressure again, players to gain and hold dominant position, then jump at the ball, palming it at its highest point. Make sure players use both sides of their bodies to protect the ball's drop zone and palm the ball with both hands.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- » Assume a dominant position as late as possible and keep it.
- » Protect the area of the ball's drop zone.
- » Hit the ball at its highest point.
- » Know where to hit the ball according to ground position.

This program was developed to assist young ruckmen playing with a team in the under-18 TAC Cup. The six-week program was to help each ruckman learn some basic techniques and improve their understanding of the game and their position. I shared some of the experiences from my AFL career and gave them some key points and goals to help them develop.



SESSION FOUR

Follow-Up Work, Second and Third Efforts, Spread

SESSION AIMS

To make the ruckmen aware of how important it is to follow up their ruckwork and compete once the ball has hit the ground. Also the importance of leaving the area of stoppage quickly (spreading) to become another midfielder.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

A ruckbag, two tackle bags and four footballs.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Using drills the ruckmen have worked on previously but adding in repeat efforts once the ball has hit the ground. First get ruckmen to jump into ruckbag, palming the ball down then roving the hit, giving a handball to a coach, then quickly running to the tackle bag, which has a football sitting on top. Taking the tackle bag to ground, quickly recovering the loose ball, handballing again to a coach. This drill can be used with boundary throw-in work and other boundary work. Another drill is to get the ruckmen to palm the ball down, then spread hard to space, getting a coach to kick the ball to them on the lead.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- » Obviously it's great to win hit-outs, but a modern ruckman also must join in and compete at ground level.
- » Having high intensity when the ball is in your area is crucial.

SESSION FIVE

Review of Performance and Preview of Upcoming Opponent

SESSION AIMS

To make the players aware of the advantages of not only reviewing their performances each week but also to find out as much as possible about your upcoming opponent so you can get an advantage and continually improve.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Stats sheets of previous game and opponent's previous game. Video footage/edits of own previous performances and upcoming opponent's performances. Pen and paper or computer to write down key points and goals.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Watch edits of previous games, focusing on centre bounces, boundary throw-ins and ball-ups. Write down and discuss positives and areas to work on. Look at strengths and weaknesses of upcoming opponent.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- » Look at a player's techniques and positioning at stoppages and in general play.
- » Watching footage can often be the greatest coaching tool as players can see themselves improving and areas in which they can improve further.

SESSION SIX

Centre Bounces, Boundary Throw-Ins, Ball-Ups and Follow-Up Work

SESSION AIMS

To work on and follow up on all general areas of ruck play.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Ruckbag, tackle bag and three footballs.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Overall review of all previous sessions, touching on all drills that have been worked on over the previous five sessions.

Practise centre-bounce work.

Competing work with ball-ups and boundary throw-ins.

Practising following up after ruck contest by getting players to rove their own taps and following up to tackle the tackle bag.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- » See sessions one to five.

Steven King is an assistant coach at the Western Bulldogs. This article was written as part of the requirements for AFL Level 2 Coach Accreditation.



COACHING RUCKWORK

BY BEN HUDSON

Ben Hudson is ruck coach at Collingwood and has played for four AFL clubs. This article was written as part of the requirements for the AFL/AFLPA Level 2 coaching course.

Description of the position/Ruckman's role in the team structure

A ruckman's primary role is to provide a physical, aggressive contest at every stoppage – centre bounces, boundary throw-ins and ball-ups. The ruckman plays a vital role in a team establishing an advantage at stoppages and clearances, giving the team first use of the ball. Winning a hit-out is not enough; it must be a hit-out to the advantage of the team's midfield.

The position has evolved and the modern ruckman is the keystone of the midfield and must provide second efforts and spread offensively and defensively from the contest.

Relationships to other positions in the team

The ruckman must have a close working relationship with the team's other midfielders and understand the strengths and weaknesses of each of them to help the team gain advantage at stoppages and clearances.

The ruckman plays a leadership role in the midfield, directing others on positioning, after

assessing the opposition, to ensure they get first use of the ball.

Player responsibilities for the position

Ruckmen are responsible for providing a contest and trying to gain advantage at all stoppages. They provide vocal leadership and communication at these stoppages to ensure set-ups are clear to the midfield and played to advantage. It is also the role of ruckmen to push back and provide support to a team's defensive players. A highly competitive workrate is required – offensively and defensively.

Characteristics required to play the position successfully

The characteristics of a successful ruckman are limitless, but the essentials are aggression and physical determination. Other key characteristics are a competitive nature, relentlessness, vocal leadership, and a preparedness to sacrifice for the benefit of the team – speed and agility are a bonus.

While some ruckmen will have grown up playing Australian Football, they can

come from other sports with transferable skills such as basketball, rugby union and even soccer. Zac Smith came from a soccer background and Kurt Tippett and Todd Goldstein from basketball.

Analysis of specialised situations related to the position (specific set plays, etc.)

Ruckmen can find themselves in many different situations throughout a game. One of the most important aspects today is that ruckmen understand their team's specific midfield set-ups and structures at all stoppages. Not only must they understand their team's hit zones but where the various other midfielders are in all stoppages, which can vary depending on where that stoppage is on the ground, the scoreline and the time remaining in the game.

Another key element is knowing the opposition's structures and its ruckman's favourite hit zones. As an example, it's time-on in the last quarter, with a minute or so remaining, and there's a ball-up on the wing, with your team protecting a lead of just

three points. In this situation the ruckman's specific role is to keep the ball in close and at worst ensure another stoppage because, in all likelihood, the opposing team, needing to score a goal to win, will have a set play of its own. This would be likely to involve the opposition ruckman hitting long and wide to space. It may sound simple, but factors such as pressure can do strange things to players.

Major characteristics of successful opposing players

Successful ruckmen can come in all shapes and sizes – athletic, with great speed and agility, like Nic Naitanui and Paddy Ryder, workhorses like Brad Ottens and Shane Mumford, or attacking and mobile such as Dean Cox and David Hille. A ruckman's ability to play a role as either a mobile tall option up forward or as a defender adds another dimension to a team – and another element the opposition team has to contend with. Regardless of shape or size, all ruckmen in the modern game must have endurance levels that match or, in some cases, exceed their midfield counterparts.

COACHING THE POSITION

Key points to get across to ruck players

In coaching ruckwork it is important to keep things simple at training, focusing on the major objectives such as contesting at every opportunity, hit-outs to advantage, spread from contests and stoppage set-ups. Learning is achieved through repetition, practising centre-bounce work with a ruckbag and one-on-one contests for ball-ups and boundary throw-ins. Repetition enables fine-tuning of ruck technique – a very specific skill in an ever-changing game.

When coaching an inexperienced ruckman in positioning, the best way for them to learn is to watch more experienced ruckmen. The skill is hard to teach. The communication and leadership aspects can only be learnt by practising in a game or perhaps a simulated situation.

A coach should encourage a ruckman to review other ruckmen in the competition and draw on specific skills that may improve them.

Specific training for the position

Apart from team training and match practice, individual ruck training is paramount to develop the specific skills for this unique position. The more experience young ruckmen can get through repetitions and competitive drills the more skilful and successful they are likely to be. This training must be combined with a strength and weights-based program early in a ruckman's career.

The ideal situation is to take all the ruckmen in a team or club aside and practise competitive ball-ups and boundary throw-ins, allowing them to work on their technique, positioning and strength through repetition of specific game-related situations.

Specific drills to develop ruck competency

- » Centre-bounce bag to practise aggression and bodywork.
- » Boundary throw-ins to practise specific hit spots (competitively and non-competitively).
- » Ball-ups to specific hit sets (competitively and non-competitively).
- » One-on-one contested marking to develop around-the-ground tall targets.
- » Second/third efforts to ensure the ruckman follows up after a hit-out.
- » Spread from stoppages, running with purpose offensively and defensively.
- » Centre-bounce ruckwork with the midfield group.
- » Centre-bounce ruckwork without the midfield group but with a wheelie bin to practise soft hands and aiming to land the ball in the bin.

Specific pre-match preparation

The days leading up to a game should involve analysis of the opposition team's structures and set-ups, the opposition ruckman's favourite hit zones and your own team's midfield set-ups and stoppage structures.

On game day only simple instructions and key focus points should be discussed – don't overload a ruckman before the match starts. As a pre-game warm-up, the ruckman should focus on jumping into the centre-bounce bag combined with semi-competitive ball-up and boundary throw-in work with the entire midfield group. It is vital during this time that the ruckman works on voice, leadership and instruction so that the group is ready to implement team plans as soon as the game begins. Other useful warm-up activity, if time permits, is competitive marking and working on ground balls and second efforts. **CE**



BEN HUDSON'S TOP 5 TIPS ON BECOMING A BETTER RUCKMAN

- 1 Be competitive and aggressive at all times on the field**
- 2 Develop a strong working relationship with your midfield**
- 3 Work to your strengths and know your limitations**
- 4 Watch other ruckmen and glean their strengths and weaknesses**
- 5 Develop a strong voice that provides direction and leadership on and off the field**

KEY FORWARD SECOND RUCKMAN

BY DREW PETRIE

The need to use a key forward as a second, or back-up, ruckman has become critical in the modern game. Here are some tips from one of the AFL's finest big men.

POSITION DESCRIPTION AND ROLES

The position in the team structure

The main role of this position is to be a marking forward who plays most of the game as the full-forward. Being a deep inside 50 option who creates a contest and kicks goals is essential. The secondary role is to back up the starting ruckman. When the ruckman is having a spell on the bench, this player needs to fill the ruckman's role at centre bounces and at all stoppages around the ground.

Relationships to other positions in the team

Often a team will start with more than one tall forward, in which case this player needs to communicate with the other tall forward to ensure they don't get in each other's way when leading for the ball. It also is vital that the small forwards know their roles. They are to lead up the ground and not be the long option inside 50.

When in the ruck, this player must communicate with the midfielders. Knowing the right places to hit the ball and where to set up in zone structures from kick-ins, etc is vital.

Player responsibilities for the position

Identifying when the starting ruckman needs a rest on the bench and being able to push up the ground into this role is important, but even more important is staying at full-forward when having started the game well by taking marks and kicking goals. Rather than be dragged away from the forward line, this player has to send the other tall forward up to do some ruckwork or get the starting ruckman to stay on the ground.

DEEP TARGET: Key forwards such as Drew Petrie must be prepared for the long kick inside 50.



VERSATILE:
Hawthorn's Jarryd Roughead is capable of kicking goals (left) and matching it in ruck contests with seasoned ruckmen such as Collingwood's Darren Jolly.



EXPECTATIONS/ROLE OF THE POSITION IN RELATION TO SPECIALISED SITUATIONS

Defensive 50 stoppage

The key forward needs to be 50 metres from the contest as a target. If the player's team wins the contest they may need to kick the ball quickly under pressure and the key forward must be there to take the mark or get the ball out of bounds in a safer area of the ground.

Forward half stoppage

The key forward should start in the goal square and be prepared to lead up at the ball when the player's team wins possession. If the opposition plays a spare player in front of the key forward, it is best to take up position within five metres of that opposition player to have a good chance of preventing that player from intercepting the ball and rebounding towards the opposition's goal.

Characteristics required to play the position

- » The player needs to be more a forward than a ruckman.
- » The main role is to compete in the air and kick goals.
- » Players in this position should be tall enough to take a high mark and athletic enough to chase and pressure the opponent when they have the ball.
- » Strength to compete in a ruck contest should not come at the expense of agility and speed as a forward.

COACHING THE POSITION

Key points to get across to players

When the key forward's team has the ball and is attacking its goal the key forward must be the deep target for the long kick inside 50. The forward needs to lead and create space when teammates are in better positions or are in space to receive the ball.

When the opposition has the ball everyone becomes a defender. The team must have a defensive mindset that forwards chase, tackle and try to get the ball back. A forward letting an opponent get an easy kick by staying inside 50 and refusing to apply pressure is not acceptable.

Specific training for the position

Goalkicking and marking are two areas of great importance for the key forward.

- » Set shots, snaps and on-the-run shots all need to be practised.
- » Set shots should be taken with a man on the mark to simulate match days.
- » A marking bag should be used to practise match-day scenarios of jumping into a pack of players when going for a mark.
- » Leading for the ball should be practised because not all kicks coming inside 50 will be long and high.
- » Ruck tap work should be practised too as this key forward has to back up the starting ruckman.

Specific pre-match preparation

Viewing vision of potential opponents to understand their strengths and weaknesses is a huge help – and should be essential when vision is available. The opponent may be strong body-on-body but slow off the mark when chasing a leading forward. Information like this can be very useful.

It also can be beneficial to look at how other teams have got the ball inside 50 against the pending opponent. For example, has it been mainly by kicking long over a pressed-up zone, or by using a leading target against a defence that may like to play from behind?

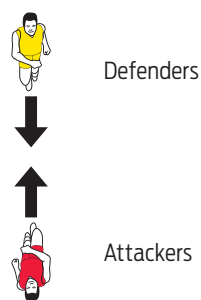
In preparing for relief ruck duties, it is recommended that the key forward/second ruckman chat with the team's starting ruckman about the opposing ruckman/ruckmen. Spending time in a meeting of the team's players who will be involved in stoppages can be very worthwhile for the key forward/second ruckman.

Key hints to becoming a better player in the position

A key forward/second ruckman always should review a game, and particularly the player's performance, with the team's forward line coach. If there is vision available it is likely there will be valuable things in it to learn/teach. If there is no vision a discussion can be had on how well the key forward/second ruckman role was performed. Then the player needs to practise those areas that need to be improved at training during the week. It also is worthwhile the key forward/second ruckman chatting with other forwards and the starting ruckman as they may have helpful feedback.

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

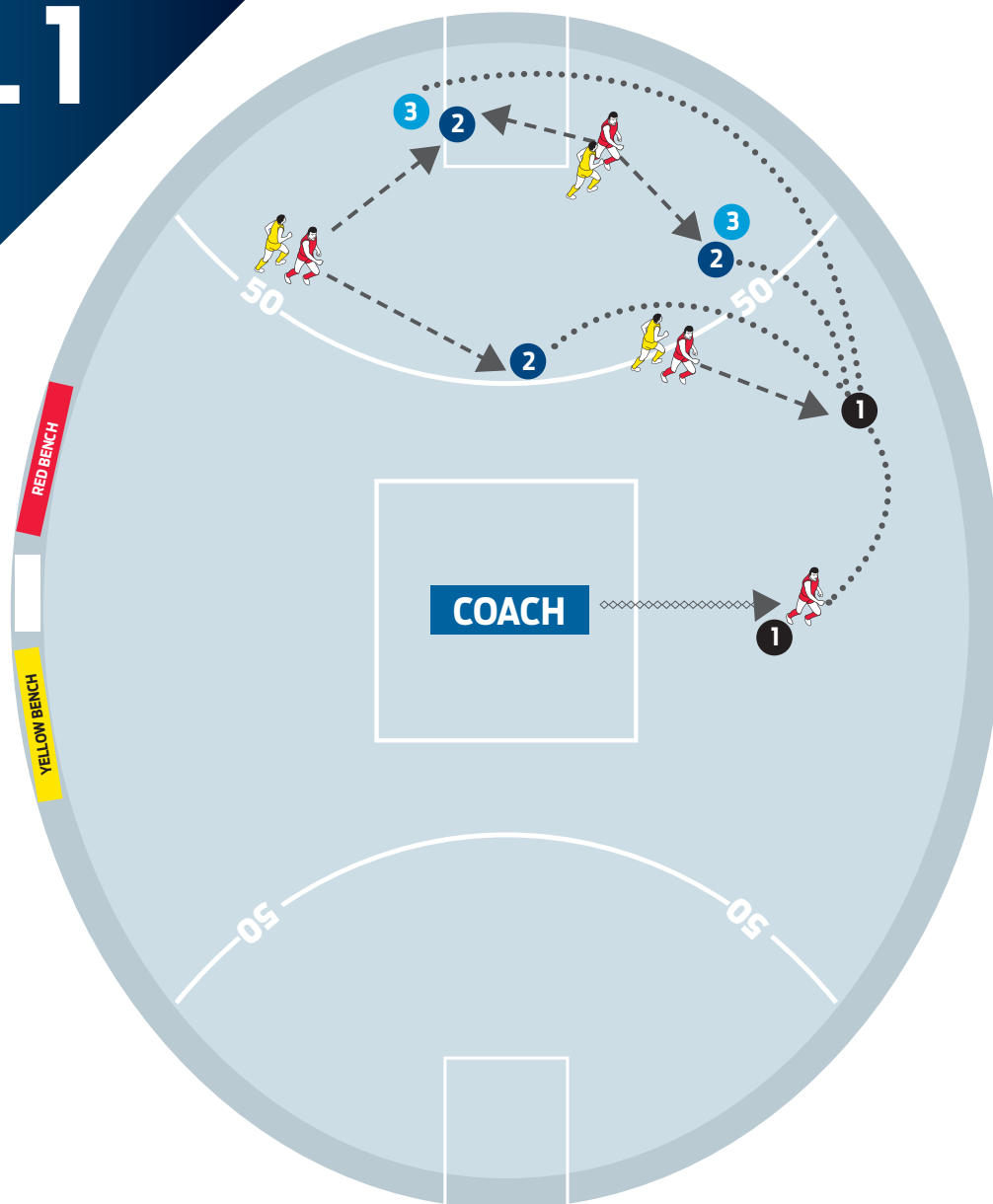
DRILL 1



RUN
- - - - -

KICK
.....

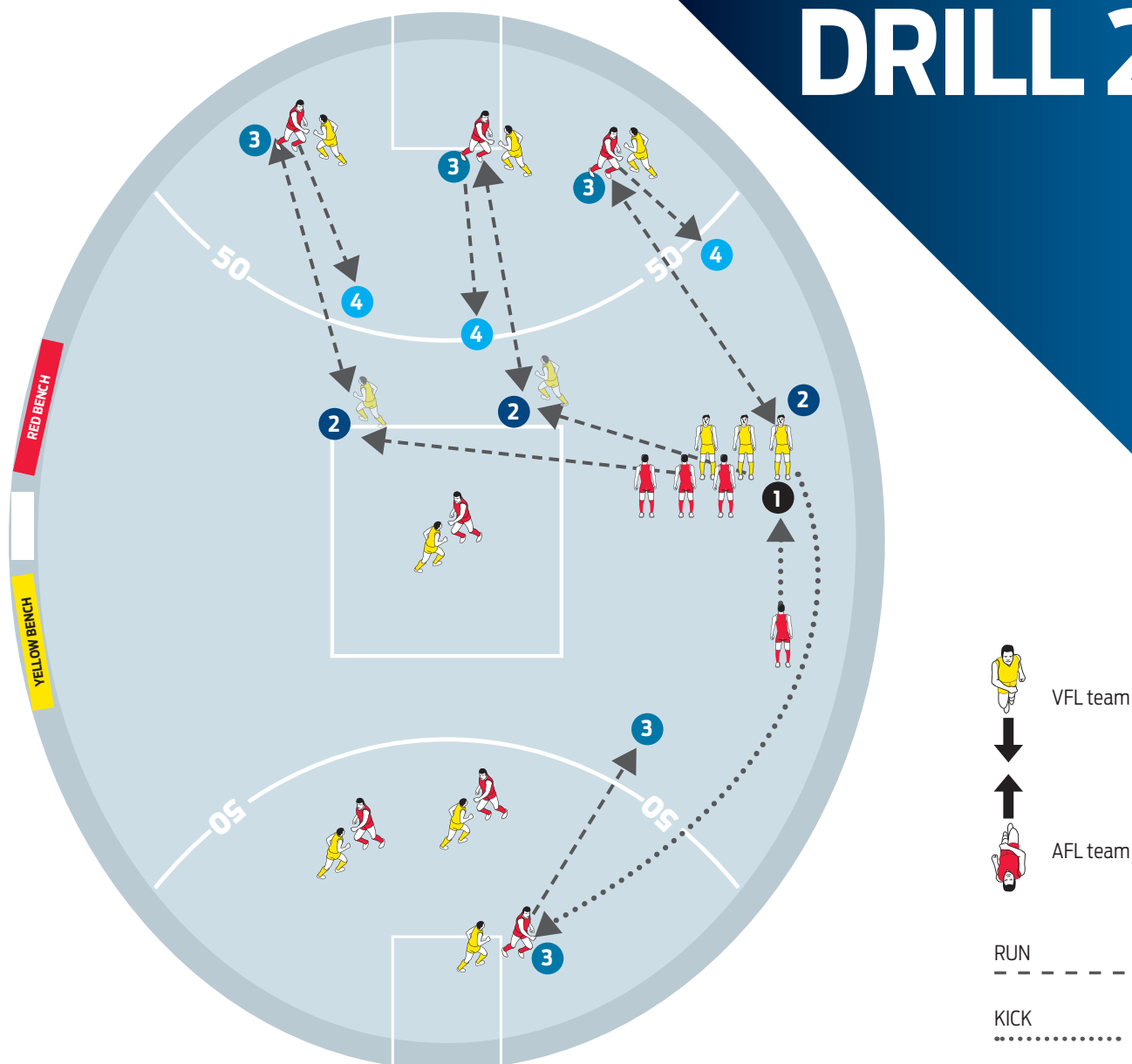
ROLL
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This drill will teach forwards they do not always start a lead from being flat-footed in the goalsquare. Often forwards may be up the ground after chasing an opponent. The forwards must then charge back towards their own goal to be in the best position to be an option for their team.

- 1 Coach rolls ball into Red who, with no pressure, kicks to a leading Red half-forward. This Red half-forward has a Yellow defending him.
- 2 While this happens, the other Red forwards reposition themselves to either lead up at their teammate, or for a long kick to their advantage.
- 3 Red half-forward looks inside 50 and kicks the ball to the best option. Red forwards should be leading at Red half-forward, with one Red forward sliding back inside 50 as the longer option.

DRILL 2



This drill has been created to teach forwards that they all become defenders when the opposition has the ball. Once the footy has been won back they become attackers again. They need to position themselves to be a leading or longer more stationary target for their teammates.

- 1** Red on wing kicks it to the three Yellows to simulate a turnover.
- 2** Red forwards must react to this by running up the ground to create pressure and help prevent Yellows from switching the play.
- 3** Yellows kick long inside their attacking 50, where Red defenders win the ball. Red forwards may come in to play as a long kick to relieve the pressure by Red defenders. If the Red defenders and midfielders run and carry the ball outside defensive 50, then Red forwards can run back towards their goal to be a longer option.
- 4** Red forwards then need to be a leading option or long option for when the Red midfielders are ready to kick the ball.

THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE

Past players have lots of knowledge and skills to give back to the game, and especially to individuals. Editor **Ken Davis** has a vision of how the fountain of wisdom can be tapped for one-on-one mentoring.

As we reach our "mature years" we come to realise that, while we may not know it all, we sure know a lot more than when we were 20.

{}We have much more experience and hopefully have learned from mistakes made along the way. We are well-placed to advise others how to achieve success.

When young we tend to go at things like a bull at a gate, making decisions purely on instinct, often without considering the implications. It is only when we have made some mistakes that we start to grasp the wisdom of seeing the big picture before embarking on a particular pathway. A young sportsperson often struggles to handle a higher level of competition against hardened professionals because of, among other things, an experience deficit.



SOLUTION TO THE WISDOM WASTE

Coaching has evolved to the extent that we now have a head coach and several specialist coaches. In time we might have one coach per player, all operating under the guidance of the head coach. It's a logical development as the game becomes ever more professional.

In this scenario, many of the forgotten players of the game could be used to mentor a player. They might watch that player's every move, and even non-move, and provide feedback to the player and head coach. Clearly these mentors would need to work within the framework of the head coach's philosophy; it could be a recipe for disaster if you had mixed messages being given to players.

In my role as a sport psychologist, I have often had to advise players on how to overcome losses in form or develop an approach that could enhance consistency. I always start that work with a player by asking what the coach wants the player to do to improve. I then work within those guidelines.

At a time when I was not working at a particular club an AFL player asked me to help him develop his game. I trained myself to watch that player exclusively, rather than the game. As well as the typical statistics, I detailed how and where he gained possessions, saw his work off the ball, watched how he made position, tracked his movement around the field, recorded the impact of his immediate opponent, and documented his involvement in the game each quarter. I was aiming to record every relevant activity in which the player was involved.

There was no guesswork in that process and I could advise the player how he could improve his output quite readily. He may have been running to spots that did not meet the style demanded by the coach. He may not have been presenting enough or been getting to the fall of the ball often enough. He may have allowed his opponent too many free opportunities.

Specialist coaches may have seen a lot of these engagements in the game, but

I believe I saw more of the player than they did. It's from that experience that I came to favour one-on-one mentoring of players. It can lead to better feedback and ultimately optimise performance. Imagine what effect a ball magnet such as Dean Cox could have been working with a player such as a young Patrick Ryder.

Crucial to the success of this proposal is the need for past players to keep up to date with the evolution of the game, so that they can maintain credibility with the modern player. They would need to be familiar with the latest jargon and game plans of the sport. Terms such as stoppages, press, spread, squeeze, corridor, talls and smalls need to become part of their vernacular so that they are not seen as outdated.

These mentors would need to meet the coach regularly and perhaps sit in on some meetings between the coach and players, so that they are aware of the game plan and role of their players.

So who is game enough to adopt such a coaching approach? Maybe, just maybe, it could provide the edge for a team to get the jump on the opposition in the quest for the Holy Grail.

The model could be replicated to some extent at all levels of football. Junior clubs could ask senior players to mentor one junior player. They might not be expected to watch all games but the process of observation would be similar.

At a senior level coaches could gather a stable of ex-players to assist in this mentoring role. It may be possible for one mentor to watch two players if the number of mentors available is less than 20. If there were only, say, five such ex-players, they could be asked to watch a different player each game over four weeks and provide individual reports. Or perhaps they could watch one player a quarter.

Whatever resources can be gathered, the process could mirror to some extent what might occur at an AFL club with these ex-players employed at probably minimal cost. CE

Given time and more insights, young players become smarter and can realise their potential. But, if we believe in coaching, we should be working to accelerate that process so that players "know it all" well before they become redundant on the field, because of aching limbs, failing eyesight or whatever.

Many former players turn to coaching but, if they don't achieve much success, they can be dropped like hot scones, relegated to the outer where they might share their experience with the fan next to them or just watch the game, at times in silent frustration.

Some who have been elite players continue to be involved in the media and we can learn from them by listening to them on radio, TV or the internet, or we can read their take on the modern game in the print media or on the web. Young players today will have been influenced by the wisdom of the likes of Leigh Matthews, Robert Walls, Kevin Bartlett and Dermott Brereton. Their perspectives can be an invaluable learning tool for youngsters.

But what of other former players? Many who were once household names in the AFL still have an active interest in the game but their wisdom is not utilised to any great extent. Some may be invited to talk at their former club but may have much more to offer and, more importantly, be willing to assist.



WORDS OF WISDOM: Young players will be influenced by former stars and now media commentators such as (from left) Dermott Brereton, Leigh Matthews and Kevin Bartlett.



PLANNING PRACTICE SESSIONS

BY DANNY RYAN

When planning practice sessions it's helpful to have an aim of what you want or need to achieve from them. That will depend on the time of year – whether it's "off-season" (leading into the Christmas-New Year break), pre-season (the weeks leading up to the first practice match), or in-season (the home and away season). The season proper has three distinct periods:

- » Early season "enthusiasm".
- » Mid-season "grind".
- » Late season, which can be a time of either "enthusiasm" or "grind", depending on the team's ladder position and whether it is going to play finals or is in contention to do so.

These phases can affect planning of training sessions. A session may need to concentrate on areas that were poor in the previous game, the coach may want to emphasise a particular team strength or may have a particular strategy in mind for an upcoming opponent and need the team to have it front-of-mind before the game.

There can be many reasons a coach wants to do particular drills. Putting in time and having a "Session Plan" will go a long way to addressing the coach's agenda.

It's also a worthwhile habit to form; it will relieve any pressure associated with having to come up with drills "on the fly" or, worse still, being lazy and just asking the players to come up with a drill. (Although that is a method that has some positives, it needs to be discussed separately. Empowering the players in any strategic thinking should not be undertaken lightly or on the spur of the moment).

Players will not thank a coach for having a session plan, but they will notice. Having one will assist the coach to be organised and professional in preparation, irrespective of the level of competition. It will give the players confidence in the coach.

Players will appreciate a coach who is organised and has a plan. They will think: "This guy knows what he's doing and where he wants us to go." Training sessions will flow more smoothly and be more enjoyable.

'THIS GUY KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING AND WHERE HE WANTS US TO GO.'

A coach does not have to stick rigidly to a session plan. There can be flexibility. Changes to the plan might be player-driven, at the suggestion of another coach, or the coach might have a change of mind on a particular drill. The coach also might need to adapt the session plan due to unforeseen circumstances.

For example, a one-hour evening practice session might be planned with four main drills but a committee member accidentally knocks the light switch off and leaves the ground in darkness 15 minutes into the session. The lights might take 10 minutes to warm up again before you can resume any worthwhile practice. The planned session now cannot be completed in the hour. It's time for the coach to adapt. Either the session is extended 10 minutes or one of the drills is shortened or dropped. The decision can be helped by the aims the coach originally identified in the session plan. If the aim was to be on the training track only an hour then a drill can be

shortened or dropped, but if the coach had decided that all four drills were important for the team the session can be stretched an extra 10 minutes to complete them.

The coach also should bear in mind that not every drill or game will work out exactly as planned. A coach can be working with up to 50 individuals and it is unlikely they will all be in tune with the coach's thoughts, so the drill or game may need to be fluid and evolve.

Sometimes a coach might get a nice surprise with where players take a drill/game.

There's no need to be too concerned if a drill/game looks "ugly" while being practised. Sometimes football is "ugly" to watch. The coach needs to be mindful that the players are attempting to execute what they were given and that they are learning or trying to stay true to the essence of the drill or game to gain a positive practice experience.

For example, if the coach has designed a contested "end-to-end" drill, with certain set-ups to be practised by the forwards, and they are not seeing much of the ball due to the evenness of the competition through midfield, it may appear to not be working. However, on closer inspection the forwards may be executing the set-ups as asked, in which case the drill has achieved its aim. It is a matter of knowing what the priorities are for the outcomes of each drill/game, and letting the players know what is being looked for in that particular drill/game.

When sitting down to plan a practice session, it helps if the coach has a clear picture in mind of the types of drills/games they want players to execute, in what order, for how long, which coach is responsible and what the main aim, outcome or learning is from each activity.



METHODICAL: Collingwood coach Nathan Buckley is meticulous with the planning and execution of his training sessions.

A SECTION OF A COACH'S PLAN MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

Time:	6pm
Activity:	Handball game – 4 teams of 5 players, swap on 3 mins
Duration:	15 mins
Coach:	Daniel K
Aim/ outcome:	Quick hands, run at opposition, ball control

It is also worthwhile for a coach to consult assistant coaches and trusted players regarding the needs and desired outcomes of a particular session. These will be derived either from the previous game (areas the team needs to improve on) or the upcoming game (areas in which the team needs to be sharp if it is to beat its next opponent).

Once these needs and outcomes are determined the coach should include them on the practice session plan. They then become the written cues or “signposts” of that session and the coach can refer back to them at a glance to ensure the session is on the right track. I would try to limit these “themes” to three, and maybe write them in red at the top of the page.

“SIGNPOSTS” FOR A PARTICULAR SESSION MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- » QUICK ball movement (be instinctive).
- » Running to LINK up (repeat efforts).
- » Instructional VOICE (coach your teammates).

These themes usually contain the same language or terminology the coach uses on match days and so are instantly recognised by the players. Repeating these themes during training helps reinforce the coach's style and philosophy to the players.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE AREAS A COACH MIGHT LOOK TO ADDRESS WHEN DESIGNING A PRACTICE SESSION PLAN:

- » Dynamic warm-up: minimum 10 minutes to get enough heat into the muscles – including some stationary skills.
- » Skills: practising the basics of the game and refining ball control – drills can be controlled or random.
- » Decision-making: usually best done through mini-game drills – for example, “Forward Scout”.
- » Contested ball: short-burst activity, with pressure applied – can be either in drill or game situations.
- » Game style: how we want to play – long, quick and direct/inside versus outside/slow versus fast (tempo).
- » Area specifics: strategies and set-ups – backline play/midfield and stoppage work/forward line play.
- » Fitness: specific to the phase of the football year – always try to incorporate balls in fitness drills.
- » Warm-down: minimum 10 minutes – including some static stretching, usually partner-based, with minimum 15-second holds.

It might take 10 to 30 minutes to draw up a practice session plan, depending on the time of year, the number of drills or games the coach wants and the complexity of the session.

Time spent planning practice is time well spent.

Making a habit of drawing up a practice session plan will increase a coach's football knowledge and understanding of the mental and physical capabilities of the team and individual players.

Don't be too precious with the plans – and include some fun elements.

After all, if players are enjoying practice they usually perform accordingly.

SWITCH OF PLAY KICK

PRACTISE IT SOLO AND IN SMALL GROUPS

Players need to use a variety of kicks in the different situations in games. The technique for each type of kick has critical elements which players need to know and practise – and they need to practise the various kicks in progressively more difficult situations. In this article we focus on the switch-of-play kick. **BY KEN DAVIS**

In the modern game, switching the play is essential to keeping possession of the ball. Bombing the ball “down the line” is rarely part of a coach’s plan.

The switch-of-play kick must be precise, as it is often in a team’s defence and usually across the face of goal. Even if the switch-of-play kick is a long way from goal, it can open up the ground for the opposition to attack.

Because of the danger in this kick, it not only needs to be extremely accurate but should travel through the air with minimum “hang time” so that the opposition cannot cut it off.

The faster the ball travels to the receiver, the more chance that player has to play on and move the ball quickly down the ground.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Kicking objective – to kick the ball accurately over a short or long distance.

KICKING ACTIVITY

- » Place a portable goalpost, bin or tackle bag in a back pocket of the ground.
- » From the opposite back pocket, gather the ball as though from a mark or free kick and push back off the mark.
- » Scan down the field, then look sideways to the target.
- » Run at the target and kick the ball with the intention of hitting the target at marking height.

VOLUME OF KICKS – HIGH

COACHING EMPHASIS

- » Players push off the mark and give themselves enough room to move freely away from the opposition.
- » Players run directly at the switch player or target.
- » Players should kick the ball low, hard and accurately.

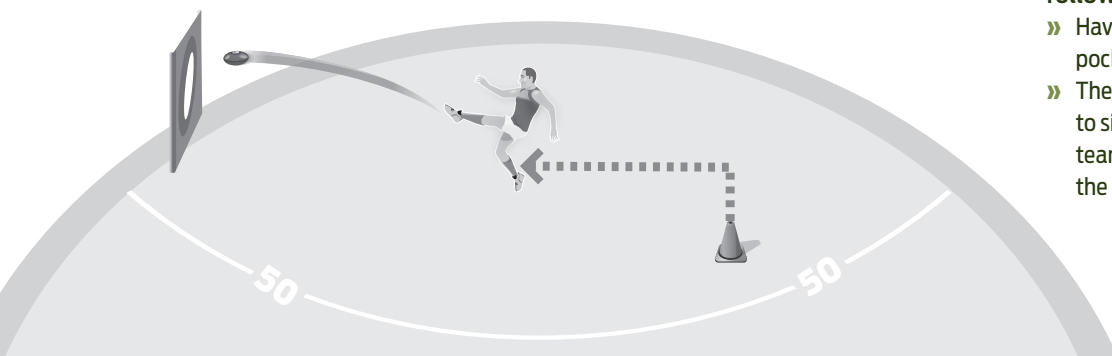
Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- » What did the kick feel like?
- » Did running at the target assist with the kick?
- » Would you go for the same kick in a game if an opposition player was within 20 metres of your teammate?

DRILL EXTENSIONS

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

- » Have two targets in the opposite back pocket and mix up which one to kick to.
- » The player kick or throws the ball high, to simulate a long ball coming into the team’s defence, marks it, then switches the play.





COOL HEAD:
Experienced defenders
such as Collingwood captain
Nick Maxwell are adept at
switching play.

‘THE SWITCH-OF-PLAY KICK MUST BE PRECISE, AS IT IS OFTEN IN A TEAM’S DEFENCE AND USUALLY ACROSS THE FACE OF GOAL. EVEN IF THE SWITCH-OF-PLAY KICK IS A LONG WAY FROM GOAL, IT CAN OPEN UP THE GROUND FOR THE OPPOSITION TO ATTACK.’

PAIRS OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Kicking objective – to kick the ball accurately over a short or long distance, often from a static play.

KICKING ACTIVITY

In a pair, players start about 30 metres apart in the back pockets.

The player without the ball leads up the field, while the player with the ball kicks on a diagonal to allow the teammate to run on to the ball.

The receiver marks the ball and pushes back, as if someone is on the mark, and looks to switch the ball back across the ground to their teammate, who has run up the ground and into a position level with the kicker.

Once the original player has received the ball, they switch the play again, using a diagonal kick, and the process is repeated.

Once the players get to the end of the ground, they turn around and repeat the drill. On the way back, the players change starting positions and the types of kicks.

VOLUME OF KICKS – HIGH

COACHING EMPHASIS

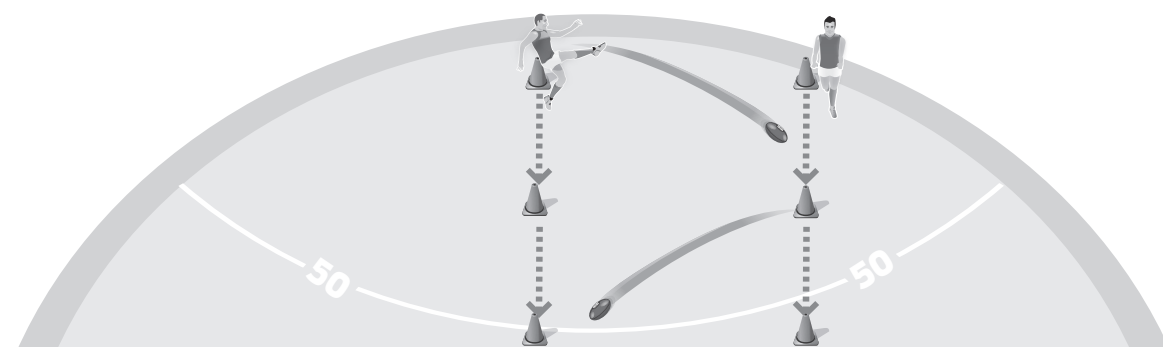
- » Players always to visualise someone is on the mark and push back hard and quickly to create space to kick the ball.
- » Players aim to kick the ball low and hard while maintaining accuracy. Players always run directly at the target.

Key questions players should ask themselves to reinforce learning outcomes:

- » What was different about the two kicks?
- » Which kick was more difficult?
- » As fatigue starts to creep in, what happened to the kicks?
- » Would you use these kicks in a match?

DRILL EXTENSION

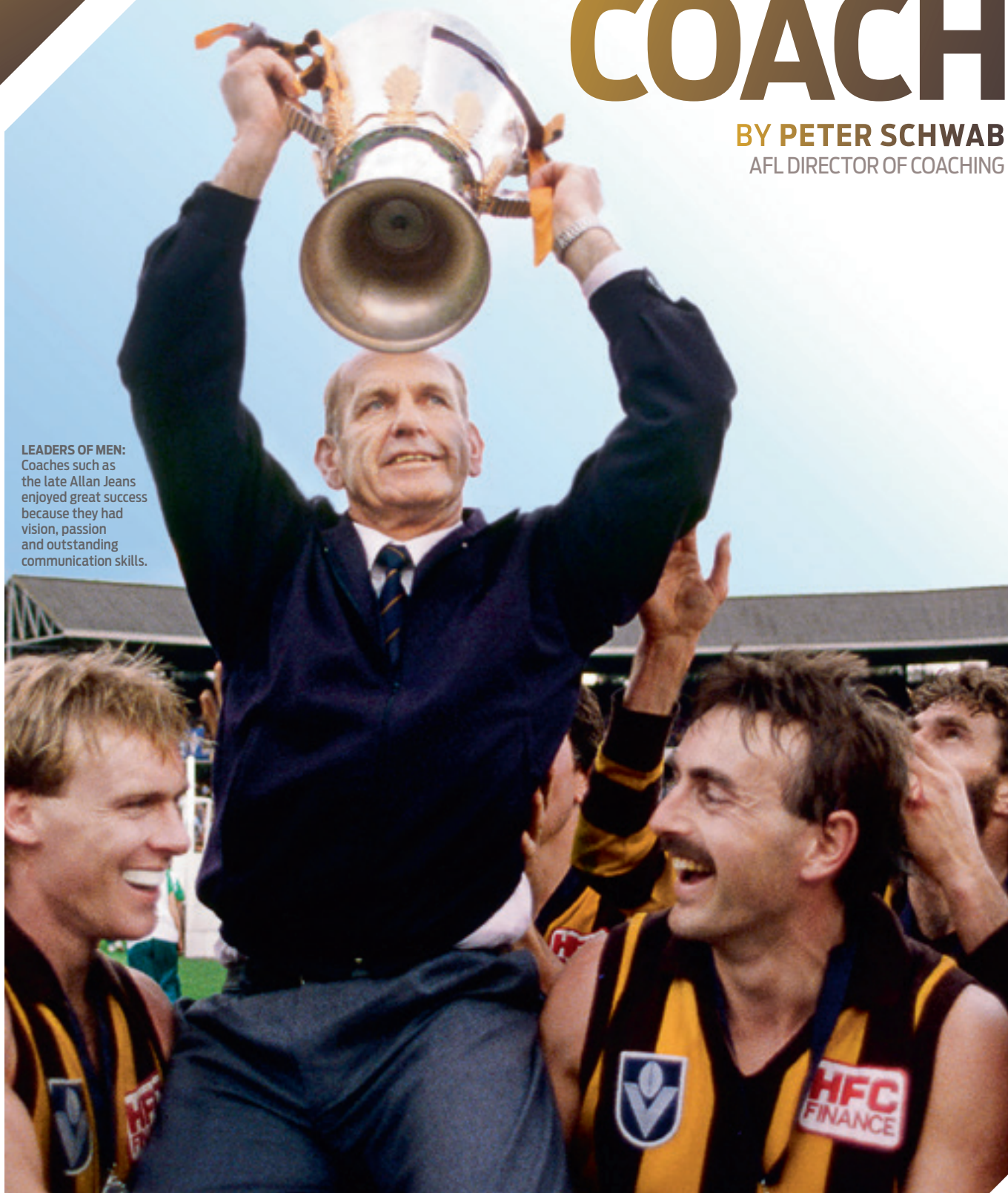
- » To make the drill more challenging, create more congestion on the switch of play by having more attacking options and adding defenders.



HOW TO ASSESS A COACH

BY **PETER SCHWAB**
AFL DIRECTOR OF COACHING

LEADERS OF MEN:
Coaches such as
the late Allan Jeans
enjoyed great success
because they had
vision, passion
and outstanding
communication skills.



‘THE EVALUATION PROCESS SHOULD BE THE SAME IN APPOINTING A COACH AS FOR SUBSEQUENT REVIEWS. THAT WAY THE APPROACH IS CONSISTENT AND THE COACH IS WELL AWARE OF WHAT THEY ARE BEING MEASURED AGAINST.’

In my experience, sometimes there isn't an evaluation process for coaches, even at the elite AFL level. Or, if there is, it often hasn't been made clear to the coach, particularly one in the final year of a contract. So the coach may not have been told, or have in writing, exactly what needs to be done to earn another contract.

Even when there is evaluation criteria, sometimes it is unrealistic or unachievable within the constraints of time, collective player ability, injuries or resources.

Goals set need to be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

How long a coach has had to perform or achieve previously-set goals needs to be taken into account.

If the contract is for three years the goals should be set for each year and the overall performance of the coach for the three years.

Measuring a coach's performance by the number of wins in a season isn't always going to provide the answers, so there needs to be a broader evaluation process.

A club is entitled to weight these eight factors any way it wants.

Of course, a coach without the technical ability will struggle – understanding the game and teaching it is a key to being a coach – but a technically good coach without passion, vision or communication skills will ultimately fail.

No coach will tick every box. They will have deficiencies, but if the coach has enough to convince a club they will be a very good long-term coach it needs to invest in that person to improve or develop the areas they are deficient in. It also can bolster its support staff with people who have the strengths the coach may lack.

There is such a huge investment in a coach at AFL level that a bad choice can set a club back, making it critical that the right selection is made in the first place.

I believe the evaluation process should be the same in appointing a coach as for subsequent reviews. That way the approach is consistent and the coach is well aware of what they are being measured against.

In the end a club can determine how long it will wait for on-field success, but it needs to make sure and needs to know why and who is responsible if success does not occur.

Believe it or not, it might not be the coach. **CE**

8 KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS

I HAVE ARRIVED AT EIGHT KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS THAT A CLUB'S BOARD OR ITS SELECTION COMMITTEE COULD BASE ITS EVALUATION OF ITS HEAD COACH ON:

VISION

Does the coach have a vision for the club and can they put people, values, objectives and strategies in place to achieve the vision?

LEADERSHIP

Does the coach have an underlying coaching philosophy, management and leadership style which can unite all sections of the club in their belief and commitment. In essence, can the coach get people to follow their lead?

TECHNICAL ABILITY

Can the coach implement a specific and credible game plan which players believe in and will adhere to, knowing it will ultimately bring success.

PASSION

Does the coach have the drive and energy to do the job and create the same energy and drive among the players and staff.

HIGH PERFORMANCE

Does the coach have the capacity to create a high-performance mindset throughout the club, encouraging a best-standards approach from everyone.

COMMUNICATION

Can the coach communicate messages to players in all situations to achieve the outcomes planned?
Can the coach also communicate effectively with all club personnel, sponsors, members and the media?

TEACHING ABILITY

Can the coach educate, train and prepare the players and staff for maximum effect in every game? Can they develop players and people? Can they teach?

IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT TALENT

Can the coach identify, recruit and develop people as well as get the right people on board?

KNOWING YOUR ROLE:

Assistant coaches such as Adelaide's Darren Milburn are consistent with their message to players. This requires understanding of team structures and patterns of play.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

10 RULES FOR ROOKIE COACHES
IN PROFESSIONAL CLUBS

BY TERRY WALLACE

Terry Wallace has coached 247 AFL games – 148 with the Western Bulldogs between 1996 and 2002 and 99 with Richmond from 2005 to 2009 – after playing 254 games with Hawthorn, Richmond and the Western Bulldogs. Here he sets out his 10 rules for a first-year coach, be it a senior/head coach or an assistant or specialist coach.

1 Ensure you are ready to be a coach, rather than it being an extension of your playing career.

It is OK to keep up a fitness regime, but it is important that your own fitness or football training doesn't get in the way of your role and duties as a coach.

2 Be ready to live the mentor's role standards and behaviours.

The coach needs to be accessible, but everyone at a club – from the board down – expects the coach to set the moral and social standards.

Work ethic/extras

Fremantle and former St Kilda coach Ross Lyon said last year: "Show me a CEO or coach that cuts corners and I will show you a lazy club or company."

The coach is essential to setting a working environment throughout the club and it's the coach's job to ensure that no stone is left unturned to get the best results for individuals and the team.

3 Build your strongest relationships with the football division.

Relationship-building throughout an entire club is important, but when things are tough it will be the tightness of the relationships with those you are working most closely with that will get you through rough times.

4 Ensure you are totally across all structures and game plans (second-guessing breaks confidence).

When you come into a new club it is imperative that you have a comprehensive understanding of the team's game plan. It is difficult enough to coach an individual, line or squad without having the knowledge and understanding of the team structures and patterns of play.

5 If you don't have a solution or answer, be up-front and don't try to bluff your way through it.

Players will accept that a coach does not necessarily have all the answers, but they will never accept a coach who tries to make up answers on the run without facts to back it up. You win ground as a coach if you don't have the answer for a player or team and are honest, providing you follow it up and get back to them with factual information.

6 Be a self-starter. Once you have a role description, grow and develop it.

The senior coach is extremely busy covering all things across the club. That senior coach is interested in your development and will guide and review you, but does not have the time to be looking over your shoulder every five minutes. You have been chosen for a position of authority and need to take on that responsibility.

7 Know your position as an assistant/development/line coach. You may have strong opinions regarding the game, but there is a time and place to air them.

Every coach has their own theories on the game. At times one person's thoughts may be clearer than those of the club as a whole, but as an assistant you need to understand that if you want your thoughts heard they should only be delivered to the decision-makers in private. Any second-guessing of club direction undermines the leaders.

8 Always talk positively about the club/football division/playing group in public. (Home truths are for behind closed doors.)

Don't lower your guard and agree with somebody as a friendly gesture if they are talking down a player, coach or the club, especially at social functions. It generally gets back – and is usually magnified.

9 If your position allows it, ensure that you deal with and develop senior players equally to younger development players.

It is easy for coaches to come in and think they can develop young players as they usually are more of a "blank canvas", but don't underestimate the impact any coach can have on the most senior player in the squad. Every sportsperson wants to improve and sometimes the higher profile the player has the less coaching that player receives, as young coaches can be intimidated. (Even Roger Federer is still looking for answers.)

10 A coach needs to bring "weapons" to any coaching role, just as a player needs "weapons" to play. Develop and grow your intellectual property by expanding your knowledge in specific areas of the game (AFL relationships/club fact-finding/Champion Data, etc).

Consider, if half the coaches at a club were going to be sacked, what strength guarantees that you are not one of them or would make you attractive to other clubs. Skill/tactical/welfare/analytical/sports psych/opposition analysis are some of the many roles – and there probably are some yet to be discovered. To stay ahead of the game, develop specialist areas that will make every club want your services. **CE**

CoachingEdge

