



MOVEMENT AT THE STOPPAGES

Split-second decisions that can determine the outcome of a contest are made at every stoppage. **By Peter Ryan.**

Winning stoppages is crucial. At each stoppage, teams are trying to execute a pre-arranged and well-drilled plan.

The ideal is for the ruckman to hit the ball to a teammate who is on the move either in the direction of goal or moving away from goal into space. Some teams use a theoretical clock face to quickly communicate where they want the ball to be hit. Unless one ruckman is dominating, teams cover all bases at stoppages, employing a go-to person, a blocker and a sweeper at centre square stoppages (see definitions in box).

Teams must hedge their bets between defence and attack because a quick, clean clearance to the opposition will inevitably end in a scoring opportunity.

Collingwood assistant coach Guy McKenna was in charge of stoppages for the Dream Team during the Hall of Fame Tribute Match. He concedes the decisions made at stoppages are

sometimes football's equivalent of Russian roulette. "It's totally a judgement call," he says.

The best midfield combinations have a balance of ball hunters, man hunters and space hunters.

Good players can fulfil several roles, happy to pick up a man but then roll off them into space if their teammate wins the ball. They can also tighten up if the opposition wins it.

As soon as the ball is bounced, each player at the stoppage has a split-second decision to make. Do I try to win possession? Do I peel off into space? Do I play tight and stay on my man?

"That's how stoppage players live their life," McKenna says. "If you can hold the ball up or slow the ball down, it doesn't matter where your opponent is, but if you make that call to affect the contest and get in there and lose the ball or lose position and the opposition get it, then your man is going to bite you on the backside by heading back or running forward to hurt you at that stoppage." ■

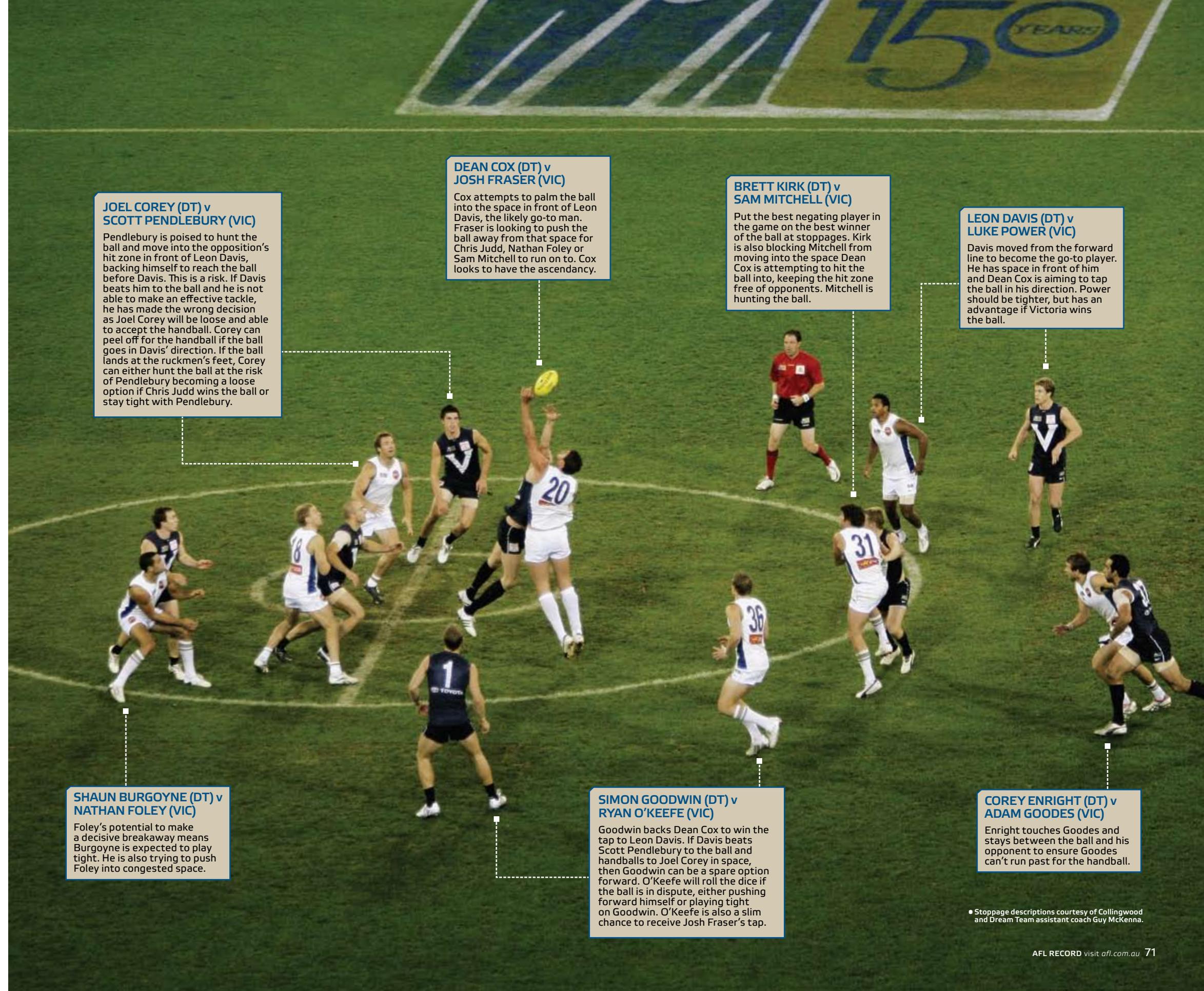
PART 4 OF A SERIES ON HOW TO PLAY THE GAME – STOPPAGES

BASIC ROLES AT STOPPAGES

GO-TO PLAYER: Attacking player looking to receive the ball from the ruckman or quickly adopt a defensive role if the ball goes the opposition's way.

SWEeper: Like a goalkeeper, is the last line of defence if an opponent receives the ball. Has to force the opposition to at least kick the ball under pressure so the backline can impact the next contest.

BLOCKER: Either protects the space for the go-to player to receive the ball or blocks opponents from moving into the hit zone.



JOEL COREY (DT) v SCOTT PENDLEBURY (VIC)

Pendlebury is poised to hunt the ball and move into the opposition's hit zone in front of Leon Davis, backing himself to reach the ball before Davis. This is a risk. If Davis beats him to the ball and he is not able to make an effective tackle, he has made the wrong decision as Joel Corey will be loose and able to accept the handball. Corey can peel off for the handball if the ball goes in Davis' direction. If the ball lands at the ruckmen's feet, Corey can either hunt the ball at the risk of Pendlebury becoming a loose option if Chris Judd wins the ball or stay tight with Pendlebury.

DEAN COX (DT) v JOSH FRASER (VIC)

Cox attempts to palm the ball into the space in front of Leon Davis, the likely go-to man. Fraser is looking to push the ball away from that space for Chris Judd, Nathan Foley or Sam Mitchell to run on to. Cox looks to have the ascendancy.

BRETT KIRK (DT) v SAM MITCHELL (VIC)

Put the best negating player in the game on the best winner of the ball at stoppages. Kirk is also blocking Mitchell from moving into the space Dean Cox is attempting to hit the ball into, keeping the hit zone free of opponents. Mitchell is hunting the ball.

LEON DAVIS (DT) v LUKE POWER (VIC)

Davis moved from the forward line to become the go-to player. He has space in front of him and Dean Cox is aiming to tap the ball in his direction. Power should be tighter, but has an advantage if Victoria wins the ball.

SHAUN BURGOYNE (DT) v NATHAN FOLEY (VIC)

Foley's potential to make a decisive breakaway means Burgoyne is expected to play tight. He is also trying to push Foley into congested space.

SIMON GOODWIN (DT) v RYAN O'KEEFE (VIC)

Goodwin backs Dean Cox to win the tap to Leon Davis. If Davis beats Scott Pendlebury to the ball and handballs to Joel Corey in space, then Goodwin can be a spare option forward. O'Keefe will roll the dice if the ball is in dispute, either pushing forward himself or playing tight on Goodwin. O'Keefe is also a slim chance to receive Josh Fraser's tap.

COREY ENRIGHT (DT) v ADAM GOODES (VIC)

Enright touches Goodes and stays between the ball and his opponent to ensure Goodes can't run past for the handball.

● Stoppage descriptions courtesy of Collingwood and Dream Team assistant coach Guy McKenna.