

HELPING A TEAMMATE

Jarrad Waite is an excellent shepherd/blocker, regularly creating opportunities for his teammates to break free with the ball. Here he puts himself between teammate Nick Stevens and Richmond's Jordan McMahon as Stevens breaks clear with the ball. Waite makes solid body contact, pushing strongly off his left leg and using his right arm firmly against the opponent to increase the blocking area and to ensure McMahon cannot get around him. He lets his teammate know what is around him.

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HOW TO PLAY

THE PERFECT SHEPHERD

Carlton's Jarrad Waite is a leader in the art of shepherding/blocking. He tells **Howard Kotton** the importance of clearing the path for a teammate.

The one-percenters such as shepherding/blocking have been an important part of Carlton star

Jarrad Waite's game since he was a young player growing up in country Victoria.

Waite is one of the leading exponents of the shepherd/block in the AFL and sees it as an important skill in the modern game.

"It's pretty useful in that it just helps your team out, but I don't check how many blocks I've had each week," the Blue said.

"I believe it's pretty important and I'm sure most of the boys do, too. If someone does a good block, we'll bring it up in our review."

A good shepherd/block is the difference between a perfect pass from skipper Chris Judd or vice-captain Nick Stevens to leading full-forward Brendan Fevola, or an errant kick that is too high and allows the defence to make a spoil.

"You do want the ball in the hands of the good users of the footy and our midfielders are generally the good users at the club," Waite said.

His primary objective is to provide a clear pathway for a teammate. "You try to make sure you get in the way of your immediate opponent and the player you're trying to protect," he said.

"You try to take the opponent out of the contest, so your player can run and get away a little bit easier than if he's got a man right behind him."

PART 15 OF A SERIES – SHEPHERDING

Shepherding/blocking is one of the game's major team skills. Players often have to help teammates who either have the ball or are in the best position to get it. A player can be legally shepherded as long as the ball is not more than five metres away. A shepherd is performed by using the body and arms as a barrier to protect a teammate.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. Get between your teammate and the opponent, but not too close.
2. Assume a brace position.
3. Fingers are outstretched and arms spread below the shoulder – do not hold your opponent.
4. Talk to your teammate to tell him he is clear.

When making the shepherd/block, Waite tries to ensure he does not make illegal contact with his opponent, particularly around the head. "The AFL has shown that part of the body is sacrosanct," he said.

"You have to make sure you make good body contact when you take the player out. It is good for the team if you see one of your teammates make a good block."

The Blues practise this skill at most sessions, often when they are doing a handball drill.

"While it's not mainstream, it's one of those skills that is vital to your team going well," he said. "You don't want to take your teammates out in training, but it gives you that practice and hopefully in a game you make the block each time." ■