

RUCKWORK

In the fifth of a series, star West Coast Eagle Dean Cox discusses the finer points of ruck play. By Howard Kotton.

s Dean Cox prepares for a ruck contest at stoppages and boundary throw-ins, the star West Coast Eagle's major priority is to be in front of his opponent.

Cox says that taking the front position gives him more control over where to direct his hit-out. But his strategy at centre bounces can vary, depending on the tactics employed by the opposition.

"Being in front makes it a lot more difficult for the opposition ruckman to get a clean hit on the football," he said. "In the centre, it varies. You might have some players who might jump early or might come from different angles.

"It helps to mix it up with a different run-up or angle, so you don't become so predictable."

The triple All-Australian ruckman spends plenty of time during the week at training working on set-ups with his midfielders. He prefers to palm the ball to a running teammate

rather than hit it in an open space, which provides a greater risk of turning it over.

Cox is rarely flustered on the field, but is not happy when his hit-out is sharked by the opposing midfielders.

"I get stuck into my midfielders, just like they would do if I'm not getting my hands on the football," he said. "My role is to tap it to a certain area and their role is to get there."

As a young ruckman, Cox picked up plenty of tips from former teammate Michael Gardiner, as well as other experienced ruckmen including Matthew Primus, Steven King and Luke Darcy.

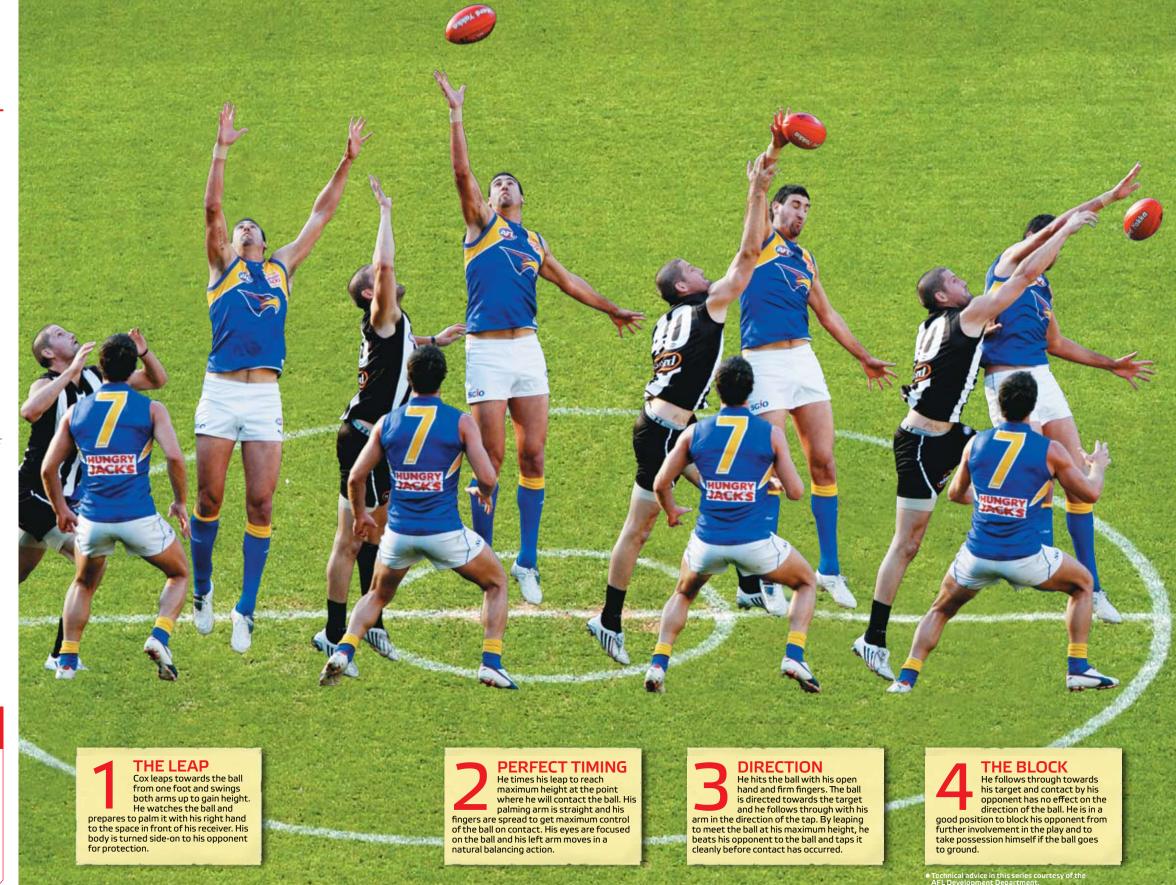
"I suppose I wasn't as strong as them and I tried to learn from a very young age the way they got in the best body position," Cox, 26, said.

"Once my strength came, I'd get in the right position and be able to tap it down to our midfield."

PART 5 OF A SERIES ON HOW TO PLAY THE GAME – RUCK

BASIC ROLES

The role of the ruckman is a crucial one in Australian Football. A good ruckman sets up play from a variety of contests such as the centre bounce or boundary throw-in. To create opportunities for his smaller, running players, it is important that a ruckman has the skill to direct the ball to his teammates' best advantage. It is worth watching top-class ruckmen such as the West Coast Eagles' Dean Cox and Port Adelaide's Brendon Lade to see how they use their various skills.



18 AFL RECORD visit afl.com.au