



HOW TO PLAY

TAPPING IN TO RUCKWORK

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

As 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.



1 THE LEAP

Cox leaps towards the ball from one foot and swings both arms up to gain height. He watches the ball and prepares to palm it with his right hand to the space in front of his receiver. His body is turned side-on to his opponent for protection.

2 PERFECT TIMING

He times his leap to reach maximum height at the point where he will contact the ball. His palming arm is straight and his fingers are spread to get maximum control of the ball on contact. His eyes are focused on the ball and his left arm moves in a natural balancing action.

3 DIRECTION

He hits the ball with his open hand and firm fingers. The ball is directed towards the target and he follows through with his arm in the direction of the tap. By leaping to meet the ball at his maximum height, he beats his opponent to the ball and taps it cleanly before contact has occurred.

4 THE BLOCK

He follows through towards his target and contact by his opponent has no effect on the direction of the ball. He is in a good position to block his opponent from further involvement in the play and to take possession himself if the ball goes to ground.

● Technical advice in this series courtesy of the AFL Development Department.