

HOW TO PLAY

TACKLING WITH INTENT

When it comes to tackling, the Swans have some of the best. **Howard Kotton** speaks to one of them, Jude Bolton.

When Sydney star Jude Bolton is about to lay a tackle, his major focus is on his opponent's hips.

"You try to look for the hips. That's the base, that's where you know they'll be moving from," Bolton said. "If you take your focus off the hips, you can sometimes be (side-)stepped."

Bolton was renowned as a fine tackler before he joined the Swans from TAC Cup team Calder Cannons in 1999.

The blond Swan has laid the fourth-most tackles in the League this season with 72. Only teammate Brett Kirk (74) and St Kilda pair Lenny Hayes (76) and Luke Ball (74) have made more.

Two of Bolton's younger teammates, Kieren Jack and Paul Bevan, come from rugby league backgrounds and the hard-working midfielder marvels at their tackling skills.

"They go at a million miles an hour in their desire to make the tackle," Bolton said. "They've got

the league background and that's helped them. We get a lot of training from some of the union and league coaches.

"Our tackling coach Les Kiss has done a lot of work with us in terms of tackling from behind. You have to be able to twist them, turn them and roll with them, so you're not just charging in and giving away a free kick.

"For me, a lot of tackling is intent. Technique might take about 20 per cent of it and intent takes up the rest, in terms of just the desire to make that tackle and make it stick. The technique is really your icing on the cake."

Bolton, who plays his 200th game against Melbourne at Manuka Oval this weekend, said tackling skills have become more important in the AFL this season.

"I think it's definitely stepped up another level," Bolton said. "I just want to make sure I'm not missing too many tackles, so that you're giving your teammates the best opportunity of winning the ball back." ■



PART 6 OF A SERIES ON HOW TO PLAY THE GAME – TACKLING

BASIC ROLES

Tackling takes practice, appropriate supervision and good coaching. There are three angles from which players can tackle – front, side and behind. Think of all the good tacklers in Australian Football and the first thing you realise is that they want to tackle when they know they can't win the ball or an opponent has the ball. The essence to good tackling, like all team play, is to want to do it and know how to do it.

1 EYES FOCUSED

Bolton has his eyes focused on the hips of the opponent (Geelong's Jimmy Bartel) carrying the ball and is going in low to make the tackle. As Bartel is turning to evade the tackle, Bolton has gripped his body at waist level with his right hand.

2 LOW AND STRONG

Staying low to ensure that the tackle is made at the correct height (around the waist), Bolton's left arm is moving to wrap around Bartel's body and left arm which is controlling the ball. Bolton says that when he is about to tackle, his major focus is on his opponent's hips.

3 ARMS PINNED

Bolton has pinned Bartel's left elbow and is using both arms to pull his opponent strongly into his body and is beginning to drop his weight to drag his opponent down. The effect of the tackle has caused Bartel to begin losing control of the ball as he hurriedly attempts to handball.

4 FREE BALL

The tackle has caused the ball to spill free giving Bolton or a teammate an opportunity to take possession and create a turnover. (If the player is judged to have had prior opportunity, a free kick would result for not immediately disposing of the ball with a kick or handball when tackled correctly).

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