



A REAL SPOIL SPORT

Graham Johncock likes to take a mark, but knows how and when to spoil when the situation arises. **By Howard Kotton.**

When Adelaide's Graham Johncock attempts to spoil his opponent in a marking contest, he always follows the team rule – make sure the ball goes forward.

The Crows work hard to get numbers back in defence when the opposition is in possession and Johncock tries to direct his spoil towards his teammates on the ground.

"You try to have a bit of control over the spoil," he said. "You don't want it to go off the fist and fall anywhere. You try to make sure you know where your ground-cover players are and hit the ball in their vicinity."

In the past two seasons, defenders have had to be careful not to infringe against the forward, with the strict in-the-back interpretation.

"They've been touchy on that rule," Johncock said.

"Everyone knows if you put your hand in the back of the opposition, you'll have a free kick paid against you.

"I think a lot of players are still getting used to it, with three or four of those situations being paid at every game each week."

In 141 games with the Crows since his AFL debut in 2002,

Johncock, 25, has been used at both ends of the ground.

As a forward, he has the same mindset as he does as a defender when he is behind his opponent.

"If I'm getting outmuscled by my opponent and he's in a better position than me to mark the ball, I'd better make sure that it comes to ground," he said.

If he is in the clear, the Crow is happy to go for the mark rather than spoil.

"If the ball is there and you're in the right position to take the mark, then (you) back yourself in to take the mark," he said. "But a lot of forwards like to play in front of defenders and, if you're a defender, you try to bring the ball to ground."

The Crows do a lot of one-on-one work at training when they can practise their spoiling technique.

"I get some confidence out of that and try to take it into games. It definitely helps," Johncock said.

When he started in the AFL, one player he respected as a defender was former Port Adelaide captain and Brownlow medallist Gavin Wanganeen.

"He was a pretty courageous backman who took big marks and took on the best forwards in the competition," he said. ■

PART 9 OF A SERIES – SPOILING

Spoiling is an effective method of preventing an opponent from marking or gaining possession of the ball. When attempting to spoil the football away in a marking contest, it is imperative the player maintains eye contact on the football at all times. If he takes his eyes off the ball in a marking contest and makes contact with the player attempting to mark, a free kick will be awarded.

Here, **Graham Johncock** has his eyes firmly focused on the ball and at no stage has placed his hands in the back of West Coast's **David Wirrpanda**. As the ball has arrived, Johncock has fully extended his arm for maximum reach and, using a clenched fist, has punched the ball away from the hands of his opponent. It is important that Johncock does not fall into the back of his opponent and keeps his feet to follow up the ball after spoiling it away. Ideally, if in the defensive section of the ground, Johncock should be aiming to spoil the ball towards the boundary line.

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