



HOW TO PLAY | THE SCIENCE OF KICKING

Collingwood star Alan Didak is renowned as one of the best kicks in the AFL. In this first of a series highlighting the skills of Australian Football, the Magpie talks about why he is such a good kick and has some sound advice for footy's next generation. **By Howard Kotton.**

Alan Didak's ability to kick the football with uncanny accuracy and precision did not happen overnight.

The talented Magpie honed his skills over many years of practice

in the backyard and at school in South Australia.

As a youngster, Didak practised at every opportunity. "Most of the time I was kicking the footy with my mates," he said. As Didak swings on to his trusty left foot,

the hopes of the vast Magpie army are raised in expectation.

Whether it's putting a drop punt down a teammate's throat or a miraculous snap from the boundary, he rarely lets them down.

But even the best kicks in the game have an off day, just as he did when he missed a crucial goal against North Melbourne two weeks ago.

In the heat of action every week, Didak says he does not have time to think about his kicking too much – he just does what comes naturally.

"I honestly don't even think about it, I just do it. Hopefully it comes off," Didak said.

When he has time to go back behind the mark and kick the ball, Didak's major priority is to ensure he is "nice and relaxed".

"I just walk back and take a couple of deep breaths," he said. "When I'm having a shot for goals, I make sure my body is facing the goals and keep telling myself, 'just kick straight'."

Didak prefers to use his left boot, although he admits he is kicking more on his non-preferred right these days.

"I'm pushing up the ground a lot more and probably getting caught on my right-hand side a fair bit," he said.

Despite being one of the best kicks in the AFL, Didak continues to work hard on his kicking at training.

He has some advice for youngsters aspiring to kick as well as he does. "Make sure you get out there in a backyard or a paddock and keep practising your technique," he said.

"Make sure you hit the target and practise on both sides of the body. And make sure you're improving your kick because there's no point practising unless you're getting better." ■

• TECHNICAL ADVICE COURTESY OF THE AFL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

KEY TO REACHING THE TOP

Kicking is the most important skill in Australian Football. The basic skill of kicking should be taught at a young age and any faults rectified. It is important players learn the right technique while they are young.

Each week most AFL players demonstrate the ability to (a) kick under pressure; (b) pass the ball accurately to a teammate; and (c) use the ball to the best advantage of their side when kicking from a set position.

POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN KICKING THE BALL

1. Line up your body with the target. Have your head slightly bent over the ball. Hold the ball over the thigh of the kicking leg.
2. Guide the ball down with one hand.
3. Point your toes at your target – watch the ball hit the foot.
4. Follow through straight towards the target.

The preferred kick among AFL players is the drop punt.



1 As he prepares to kick, Didak is balanced as he runs towards his target, with his weight on his kicking leg.

2 Didak takes a long last stride to help generate power, while the non-guiding arm swings out and back for balance.

3 He drops the ball vertically with his guiding hand as he is about to make contact with his boot. His support leg braces his body while the knee is tightly flexed before quickly extending for contact. The non-guiding hand comes forward, while his head is still over the ball.

4 Didak's leg accelerates through impact as his body drives forward and up. Contact is made high on his instep and he follows through towards the target with his head still.