

AFL VIC COACH2COACH PODCAST:

(2018 EPISODE 4 TRANSCRIPT)



LA: Hi everyone and welcome to Episode four of AFL Victoria's podcast- Coach2Coach - talking all things AFL coaching for local junior clubs!

Your hosts are Education and Training Manager Lauren Arnell, State Coaching Manager Steve Teakel and Carlton Assistant Coach Dale Amos.

In this episode, we'll be discussing injury prevention and management at local junior and youth teams. Let's get into it...

LA: Dale – tough and courageous are often words that coincide with AFL footy. How do you see that impacting junior levels?

DA: Well I think it impacts coaches at all levels – when I started coaching at local level there was a vision or an image I had of what a tough and courageous poster type AFL player was. I was really fortunate that I got to experience that with Joel Selwood at Geelong. But I think as a coach, I was influenced originally because I wanted them all to be like that and it was a big mistake that I made. The team is made up of different shapes and sizes, abilities and skill sets. Some players are like that (Joel Selwood) but if *all* your players are like that you're probably going to finish last in the competition. I think it's a bit of a trap that coaches can fall into. You need to make sure that you don't expect all of your players to play like that.

LA: It's a good example isn't it? At the end of the day we do want all of our players being able to play each week. Steve in your time – you've seen some safe and perhaps unsafe practices?

ST: Yes. I still remember the old adage that you just "ran it out" – whether you had a corky or another injury we were just told to keep running laps and that will get it out of your system. So I don't know how safe or productive that was for our players but it was something that was all mentioned to us. Icing is the other thing – my kids say that every time they got an injury that all dad would say is, "just ice it and that'll be right, that'll make it better!"

So I don't know how safe I was as a parent that way.

LA: Well we are very fortunate to have Brooke Patterson joining us on the podcast. Brooke, you're a physio, an AFLW footballer and a PhD candidate. Thanks for fitting us into your schedule!

BP: Thanks Lauren, very happy to be here. I'm really passionate about junior sport and getting our kids active. Particularly implementing some of the injury prevention programs that a lot of you have probably heard about lately. I wanted to start by saying that I think we need to re-term the language around injury prevention and get people thinking more about **injury reduction**. Footy is an unpredictable sport and injuries do happen and that's a part of it. But certainly, there is good evidence to show in large scale studies that we can reduce a lot of injuries by up to 50%. So what we want to talk about here is just some easy ways that coaches can implement injury reduction strategies.

What is involved?

- A good warm up – muscle activation and replicating various movements you would see in a game.

- Strength component
- Load management – being aware of fatigue in kids who are playing multiple sports and managing any injuries from those so that they don't re-injure.

LA: You mentioned strength and a good warm up. When you say strength, what types of things can local coaches implement for the junior age groups?

BP: A lot of people think, "Oh, I've got to get my kid in the gym." And that's certainly not the case. The injury prevention program that has been designed specifically for AFL is FootyFirst. All of the strength exercises in that program don't require any equipment. They can be done with a partner and no equipment. So that's the strength aspect and it can be completed before, during, or after a training session. There's no risk of injury when you choose to time the FootyFirst exercises.

ST: How much time should coaches be providing at training for FootyFirst and injury reduction programs?

BP: A lot of coaches tell us that they don't have time to include 10-15 minutes of this in their training sessions. So these programs are designed to be incorporated in to the training session, not sit separately so that coaches can still use their time effectively. Coaches can be creative with it. The warm up is normally 5-10 minutes and while the players are doing the movements you can have coaches with footballs at the end of each lane or within the activities to develop skills alongside these movements in the warm up. It might be changing direction with a footy so that the player is not just doing it because you're telling them to. You're actually saying, "Now you're going to get a ball and you're going to have to change direction to get the ball and to think about how you're doing that movement."

DA: It's a really interesting concept and I like the fact that it is starting to be incorporated into local footy. It's a huge part of AFL programs now and people would be surprised at the mundane and routine nature of some of the movements that the AFL players are doing to prevent injury. A big part of our program at Carlton is trying to reduce the risk of injury as opposed to treating the player after the injury has occurred.

BP: Certainly the consequences of injury can be widespread from the immediate impact of not being able to play but also the risk of other injuries and longer term consequences. Primary prevention is really important and we have the capacity to make the biggest impact in our junior players rather than waiting until they are at senior and possibly elite level.

DA: So is it a combination of both preparing players for a game and also upskilling them in footwork? I know agility, change of direction and foot positioning are big in AFL footy and there is a significant transfer into performance for players.

BP: Not only does it reduce injury, it actually improves performance in strength, agility, speed testing and jumping which are all really important aspects of AFL. And that's what I would like to get across to coaches is that this will improve player performance, not just reduce the chance of injury. If you think about footwork – getting back off the mark, getting short steps into a tackle – all the things that are trained within the injury prevention programs are all very specific to AFL and I think if we can tie them in together and perhaps work together better in creating drills and making the connection between a mundane warm up and skills then the players will enjoy it more. The kids often don't see the point to it but if the coach is educating around why then I think we will get a lot more buy in from everyone.

ST: Are the programs more focused around lower body or is there a full body type warm up?

BP: The strength is all related to lower body but the movement patterns will help reduce some of the upper body injuries. Concussion is a big injury at all levels of AFL so if you can teach the players how to bend their knees and hips in the proper way that will transfer into how they pick up a ground ball which will transfer into how they protect their head, shoulders and neck.

ST: You mentioned workload for young players and often they are playing multiple sports. How does the local coach help the individual player manage that?

BP: That is a big issue in junior sport. We certainly don't want coaches demanding that young people choose one sport because loading the body in different ways (in different sports) is really beneficial for young people and athletes so that they are not doing the same, repetitive movements because that can lead to possibly more injuries. The variety is really good and it's also important to be aware of their overall load and if they are tired and fatigued then giving them a night off and understanding that is important too.

DA: Brooke, a big issue in AFL at the moment is concussion and the way it is treated. What are your thoughts and what are the implications for local clubs which are not as well resourced?

BP: Coaches play a vital role in the prevention and management of concussion. Teaching the correct technique for a lot of our key skills, how to protect your body in a contest etc. My message to coaches would be don't underestimate how important it is to go over the fundamentals again and again – coaches at the elite level are spending a lot of time on those fundamentals too.

In terms of management, the AFL community has a lot of good resources on their website. There is lots of information on what to look for in terms of concussion. We know a lot of people don't fully understand what concussion actually is. People can have various symptoms from dizziness, vision and balance issues. In terms of management on field for volunteer coaches and parent trainers it is recognising whether there has been a head knock and removing that player from the field for assessment to see if they do have any of those symptoms.

ST: One of the good things on Coach.AFL (the new learning management system for all AFL community coaches) is that each year coaches need to sign up to be a member and reaccredit – concussion is one of the online learning modules which all coaches need to complete. There will also be important refresher online modules each year.

BP: It's great that AFL has made a real focus on concussion prevention and management. The policy states that players must have a medical assessment and clearance before they return to school and return to sport because any stress on the brain can impact the recovery from concussion. The key message is that if you are in doubt around whether it is concussion or not then it should be a really conservative management approach.

LA: To pick your brain with one last question – we are fortunate to have yourself as a physiotherapist on this podcast but for local clubs and parent coaches, what is the best way for them to source a physio or trainer for their team? How can they go about that to know they have quality people looking after their kids?

BP: One of my ideas for this is trying to engage with a local physio or sports medicine centre. Most physios in this setting will be aware of the specific injury prevention programs like FootyFirst and know how to implement them. Obviously a barrier for most local clubs is financial resources so what I often propose to clubs is to approach the local physio and let them know you'd love them to come down to the club and that you want to implement the injury prevention program at your club. In return the club can recommend that physio centre for players when they do get injured to go and

see the physios there. Whether that is through a newsletter or different communication methods. If that doesn't work, the club can also pay the physio for their time. If you've got 10 teams in a community club, \$20/team is essentially a gold coin donation per player and it is a pretty good investment as a parent I think to get that. \$200 would easily cover the physios time and preparation to come down.

LA: Thank you so much Brooke for joining us and sharing your insights. We know that this will help positively influence local footy. Steve and Dale, we look forward the next episode.

LA: Thanks to Carlton Football Club for their generous assistance in recording Coach2Coach. Thank you for listening and we look forward to joining you for our next instalment of the Coach2Coach podcast series. For more information, check out the resources on AFL Victoria website by following the links to coaching, or you can also join our Twitter conversation via the hashtag **#AFLVicCCC**.