Brett Burton has always loved flying for ‘speccies’ but as a junior his coaches encouraged him to stay down and crumb. Ironically, Burton has since become so well known for his high-flying marks after debuting for the Crows in 1999 that he is now almost universally known as ‘The Birdman’. "For me, it’s really all about the feeling to be able to lift your whole side. That’s a good individual point of view. When you see guys take hangers, it lifts the whole side. That’s a good feeling to be able to lift your side."

"The Birdman’ was hatched. "When I go for a mark, I don’t necessarily try to take the biggest mark or a screamer. "I always just watch the ball and try to take it at its highest point. I don’t take any notice of anyone around me because you can’t affect what they’re going to do, you can’t tell them to stay put so you can jump on them.”

Ironically, Burton has since taken him close to his current height of 183cm. Burton broke into Glenelg’s SANFL team at 19 in 1998. Playing at centre half-forward, he finally had the licence to fly for his marks and ‘The Birdman’ was hatched. Drafted by the Crows at the end of that season, Burton brought his one-man air show to the AFL. Much to the delight of crowds across the country, his three coaches at Adelaide – Malcolm Blight, Gary Ayres and Neil Craig – gave him free rein to continue doing what he does best.

"It is exhilarating, you get a big buzz out of it. You can hear the crowd noise when you go up and, if you take it, it gets even louder.

"But it’s not just from an individual point of view. When you see guys take hangers, it lifts the whole side. That’s a good feeling to be able to lift your side."

Now in his 10th AFL season, Burton says high marking has become almost second nature to him, so much so he rarely practises it: "It certainly comes naturally to me now and you’re best to stop thinking about it too much and just letting it flow,” he said. "For me, it’s really all about the timing. What I tell myself is when you see the ball, hold yourself back, then go late and try to take the ball at its highest point.

"When I go for a mark, I don’t necessarily try to take the biggest mark or a screamer. "I always just watch the ball and try to take it at its highest point. I don’t take any notice of anyone around me because you can’t affect what they’re going to do, you can’t tell them to stay put so you can jump on them.”

Now 30, Burton is continuing to rack up the frequent flyer points in 2008 as evidenced by his classic hanger over Melbourne’s Matthew Warnock in round eight (pictured right). " ‘For me, the hanger is one of the reasons you play footy,” he said. "It is exhilarating, you get a big buzz out of it. You can hear the crowd noise when you go up and, if you take it, it gets even louder."

"But it’s not just from an individual point of view. When you see guys take hangers, it lifts the whole side. That’s a good feeling to be able to lift your side.”

PART 3 OF A SERIES ON HOW TO PLAY THE GAME – OVERHEAD MARKING

The ball is met slightly in front of the head with arms extended. It is firmly gripped in the fingers.

THE GRIP
Ensure the fingers are outstretched and the thumbs almost together.

GENERAL COACHING HINTS
1. Line body up with the flight of the ball. Keep eyes on the ball.
2. Jump off one foot and swing the other knee up to gain maximum height and protect yourself.
3. Eyes are kept on the ball. Fingers are outstretched and thumbs almost together.

With his eyes still on his opponent, with his legs and head still, he has brought his hands together in the classical ‘W’ position with his fingers almost touching and thumbs outstretched. He is moving into perfect position to take the ball as high as he can.

The ball should be pulled down quickly to the chest when marking in front of an opponent. The ball is met slightly in front of the head with arms extended. It is firmly gripped in the fingers.

THE GRID
Ensure the fingers are outstretched and the thumbs almost together.

With his eyes still on his opponent, with his legs and head still, he has brought his hands together in the classical ‘W’ position with his fingers almost touching and thumbs outstretched. He is moving into perfect position to take the ball as high as he can.

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