

## **2013 LAWS OF THE GAME CHANGES**

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## **1. LAWS OF THE GAME PROCESS**

The charter of the Laws Committee is to keep the game competitive, entertaining and exciting, and as safe to play as reasonably possible within the confines of a body contact sport.

The current Laws Committee comprises myself (Chair), Kevin Bartlett, Michael Sexton, Leigh Matthews, Joel Bowden, Brett Burton, Luke Power and Rowan Sawers.

The Laws of the Game process is overseen by myself and managed by one full time resource (Shane McCurry), with support from Game Analysis Manager Joel Bowden, recently appointed Football Research Analyst Patrick Clifton and the AFL Umpiring Department.

The process comprises the following:

- Two meetings per year with club coaching groups, player leadership groups and other relevant industry bodies such as the AFL Players Association, AFL Coaches Association, AFL Medical Officers Association, AFL Physiotherapists Association and AFL Sport Science Association
- Regular communication with AFL coaches and state/community football bodies
- Research projects to monitor injury trends, physiological demands and tactical evolution
- At the beginning of the year, clubs and industry groups raise topics for discussion
- Once all topics have been collated, views are obtained on which topics should be examined further and research is commissioned to facilitate an informed discussion
- If required, a set of proposals is developed by the Laws Committee, which is then taken back to clubs and industry groups for a final round of consultation
- The Laws Committee meets several times a year to discuss the topics and review industry feedback, before developing final recommendations for the AFL Executive and Commission

## **2. OVERVIEW OF THE GAME IN 2012**

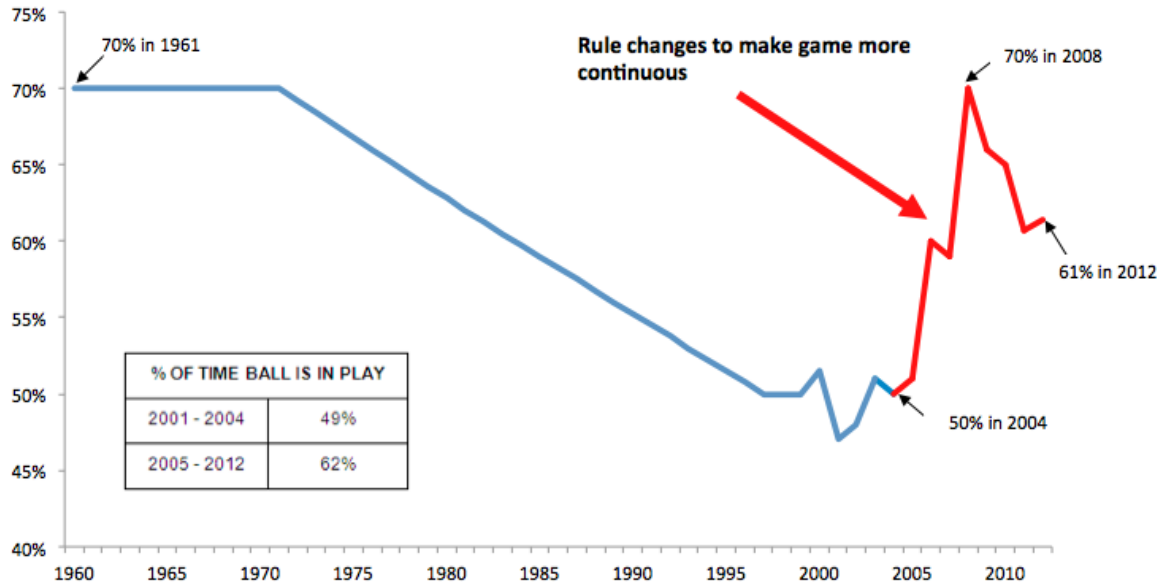
### ***2.1 Background and previous rule changes***

Research in 2004 revealed the game had become more stop-start and less continuous. The total number of stoppages had increased, percentage ball in play time had decreased to less than 50% (blue line in the figure below), and this was having an impact on game style. Supporters were concerned because the No. 1 key attribute they value is a free flowing/continuous game.

Several rule/interpretation changes have been introduced in the period 2005-12. The majority of these were designed to make play more free flowing, continuous and exciting:

- Remove requirement to wait for flags to be waved before kicking in (2006)
- Stricter interpretation of holding the ball (2005 & 2006)
- Reduced time allowed after marks & free kicks (2005 & 2006)
- Holding up a player after a mark or free kick (2005 & 2006)
- Quicker boundary throws ins, ball ups and centre bounces (2006)
- Limit time for set shots on goal (2006)
- Stricter interpretation of deliberate kick out of bounds (2006)
- Less time to award 50m penalty (2006)
- Free kick for deliberate rushed behinds (2009)
- Stricter interpretation of deliberate out of bounds (2010)
- Interchange substitute rule (2010)
- Advantage rule – player not umpire decides (2011)

The intention of these rules was to make the play more continuous, free flowing and exciting, not to increase the speed of the players. Keeping the ball in play reduces player rest time and has the effect of slowing down the players but opening up the game. As a result, there was an increase in the percentage ball in play time to approximately 60% as indicated by the red line in the figure below.



Source: TRAK Performance 2012 Report

There have also been a number of other rule changes which have made the game safer for players and enhanced traditional features of the game such as the marking contest.

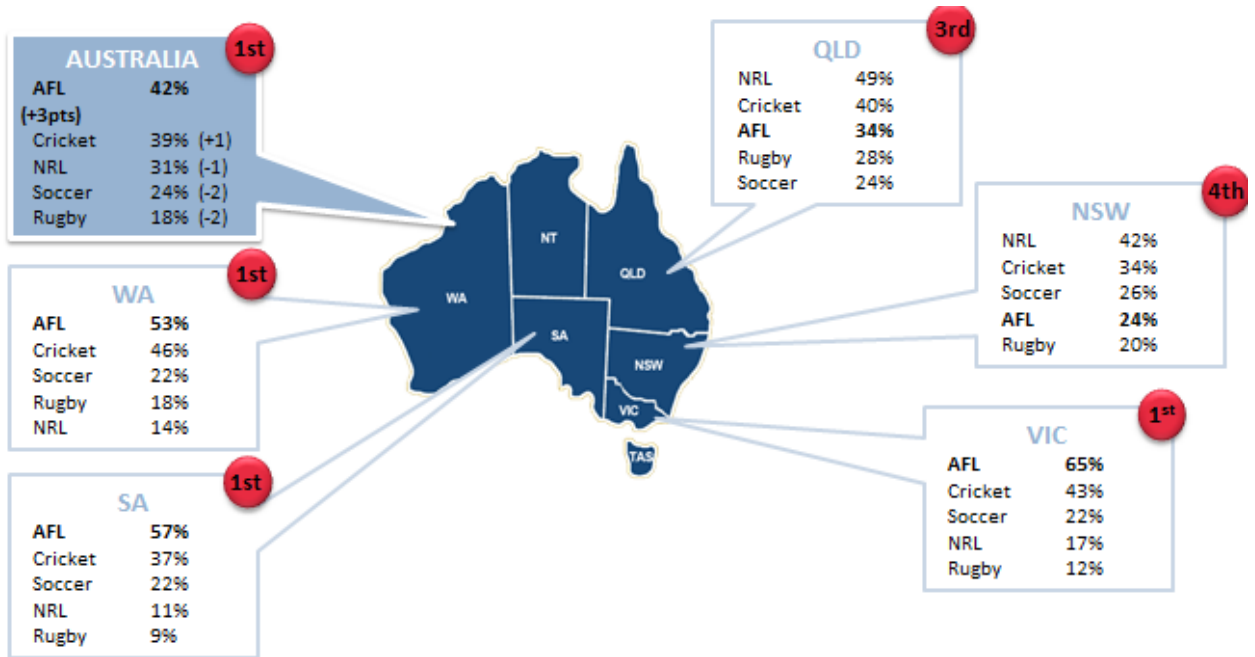
#### PROTECT PLAYERS FROM INJURY

- Ruck rule (2005)
- Bumping or making forceful contact to an opponent from front on (2007)
- Stricter policing of dangerous tackles (2007)
- Rough conduct [head-high bump] (2009 & 2010)
- Interchange substitute rule (2010)
- Free kick for sliding feet or knees first or late into a contest with force (2011)

#### ENHANCE THE MARKING CONTEST

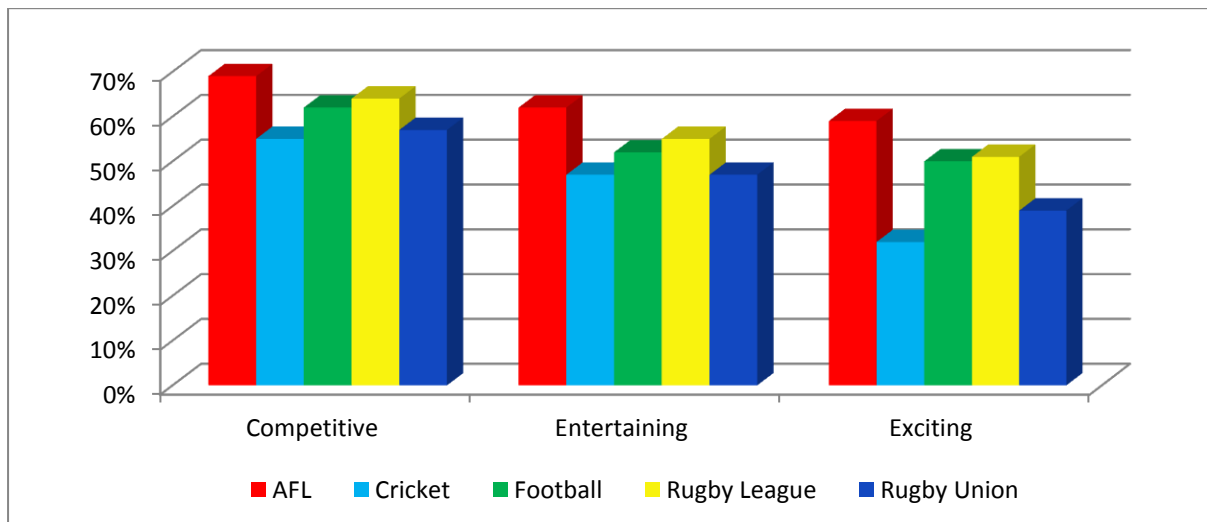
- Chopping the arms (2005)
- Stricter policing of holding and blocking in marking contests (2006)
- Stricter policing of hands in the back in marking contests (2007)

AFL took the position of Australia's No. 1 sport in 2011 as measured by fan popularity.




Source: Repucom, 2011

The three key factors which distinguish AFL from other sports are because it is considered 'Competitive', 'Entertaining' and 'Exciting'.



Source: Repucom, 2011

## 2.2 Recap on 2012 new initiatives

Initiative	Outcomes (All figures after 23 rounds)												
Introduction of Score Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 77 reviews in 198 games – avg 3 per week</li> <li>• 11 occasions has corrected a score</li> <li>• Has removed doubt in 62% of cases</li> <li>• Average duration of 41 secs</li> </ul>												
Stricter interpretation of sliding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarification issued to clubs</li> <li>• Free kick for feet or knees first reducing this dangerous practice</li> <li>• 11 free kicks paid</li> </ul>												
Two tweaks to advantage rule: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• player given slightly more time to decide</li> <li>• no advantage for out of zone free kicks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive feedback from industry about way rule has been implemented and policed</li> </ul>												
New I/C gate line markings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New markings have minimised I/C free kicks</li> <li>• 5 free kicks for major infringements in 2012 compared with 14 in 2011</li> </ul>												
Game length/continuity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quicker throw ins (avg 11 sec, 0.8 sec quicker)</li> <li>• Faster goal restarts (avg 45 sec, 2.4 sec quicker)</li> <li>• Quicker ball ups (avg 10 sec, 1.5 sec quicker)</li> </ul>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Season</th> <th>2008</th> <th>2009</th> <th>2010</th> <th>2011</th> <th>2012</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Game Length</td> <td>119.6</td> <td>120.9</td> <td>122.3</td> <td>123.1</td> <td>122.1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>Source: Champion Data, 2008-2012</i></p>	Season	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Game Length	119.6	120.9	122.3	123.1	122.1
Season	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012								
Game Length	119.6	120.9	122.3	123.1	122.1								

In addition to the new initiatives, a number of focus areas were identified at the start of the season relating to existing laws and incentivising a free flowing game and quick ball movement. These focus areas were included on the Laws of the Game DVD delivered to all coaches, players and media prior to the season, and umpires are coached in accordance with them over the course of the season. The focus areas for 2012 were:

- Holding the ball (player must make a genuine attempt to dispose of the football even if he has not had prior opportunity)
- Holding at stoppages
- Deliberate out of bounds
- Interfering with a marking player
- Allowing the team who has earned the ball to move it on quickly (protected area, cribbing, throwing ball back, holding after mark or free)

### 2.3 Key statistics in 2012

Key statistics have stabilised in 2012, however with further evolution of tactics combined with the use of the interchange, congestion has increased. Possession in 2011/12 has been characterised by more long kicks, more contested marks, more contested possession, with less short kicking and less backward kicking.

POSSESSION								
Year	Disp	H/b	Long Kicks	Short Kicks	Back. Kicks	Cont. Poss.	Unc. Poss.	Cont. Marks
2012	715.4	303.3	111.0	153.4	17.1	283.0	428.6	23.2
2011	720.4	310.3	108.9	152.6	16.6	288.1	428.5	25.4
2010	741.9	340.3	91.7	167.8	20.4	266.8	480.9	22.6
2009	748.3	354.8	76.8	179.7	20.7	247.6	510.1	20.7
2008	709.8	310.2	78.7	188.0	19.9	235.6	486.2	20.2

Defensive trends have been similar in 2011/12 and clearance rates improved. However, assessment of longer term trends reveals that defensive pressure has increased markedly over the previous decade, with tackles significantly increasing and kicking efficiency/scoring significantly decreasing. These trends are further exacerbated during finals matches. Boundary line play has also increased in prevalence in recent years with throw-ins remaining at an average of 40 per game in 2012. Feedback from club coaching groups, an analysis of the ball movement and statistical trends during this year's final matches suggests the trend of playing around the boundary will continue in 2013.

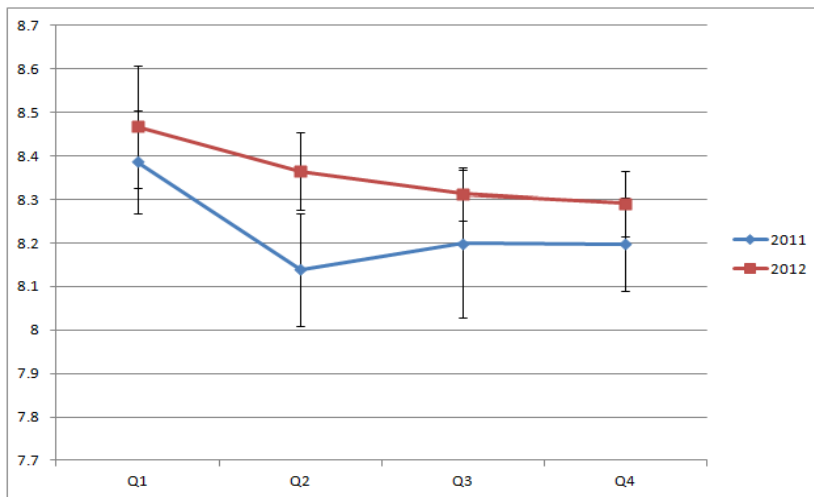
DEFENSIVE PRESSURE					STOPPAGES				
Year	Disp. Eff.%	Kick Eff.%	Tackles	Scoring	Year	Centre Bounces	Ball Ups	Throw Ins	Clear. Rates
2012	72.5	66.3	127.1	184	2012	30.1	24.0	39.6	80.3%
2011	72.0	65.9	137.6	186	2011	30.4	23.8	40.1	80.3%
2010	73.1	66.4	134.6	181	2010	29.5	25.0	35.6	77.5%
2009	74.5	66.7	123.9	182	2009	29.9	29.0	31.8	75.0%
2008	75.0	68.0	107.1	197	2008	31.7	23.9	27.1	78.0%

Midfield Ball Movement			
Season	Corridor	Wider corridor	Boundary
2012	30.3%	31.2%	38.6%
2011	30.2%	30.1%	39.7%
2010	33.0%	32.2%	34.8%
2009	32.9%	31.4%	35.7%
2008	33.3%	30.6%	36.1%

Source: Champion Data, 2008-2012

## 2.4 Congestion

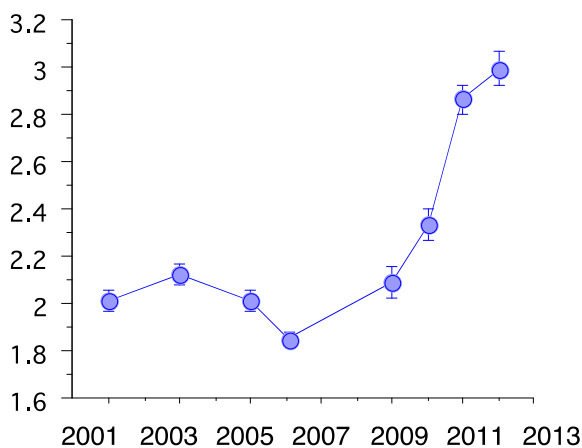
GPS based research shows congestion has increased in 2012 (figure below) but there is variance between games and teams. In addition, congestion reduces over the course of a game as players fatigue. The increase is a combination of tactical evolution where “defence is the best form of attack”, and the interchange/player conditioning, with fitter and fresher players able to perform defensive efforts more effectively. There are regular occurrences of all players in the field squeezed into a 60m x 80m section of the ground to place pressure on the opposition and generate their next scoring attack, and this pressure is more readily sustained over the course of a match.



**Congestion Research**

Source: Clifton, 2012

Further evidence of the increase in congestion is provided by video-based TrakPerformance player density tracking which illustrates both a significant rise in the average number of players within 5 m of the ball since 2006, and a significant increase between 2011 and 2012 (refer figure below). The games analysed in 2012 showed that there were 5 players within 5 m of the ball 24.8% of the time (up from 24.3% in 2011), and 3-10 players within 5 m 34.0% of the time (up from 29.9% in 2011). The maximum number of players within 5 m of the ball at any time was 19.



**Player Density Analysis**

Source: TrakPerformance, 2012

### **3. LAWS OF THE GAME CHANGES FOR 2013 PREMIERSHIP SEASON**

#### **3.1 Forceful contact below knees**

*A free kick will now be awarded against any player under existing Law 15.4.5 a (ii) Prohibited Contact, who makes forceful contact below the knees of an opponent (this does not apply to smothers with the hands or arms).*

There is a serious injury risk associated with forceful contact below the knees, as has been evident in a number of examples from recent seasons where such contact has caused serious lower limb injuries such as broken legs, ankles and knee ACL injuries (refer examples below).

There are still instances where forceful frontal contact below knees is resulting in injuries, where a player dives head first or goes to ground from the side into an opposition player's legs. The change, supported by several player leadership and coaching groups, the AFL Medical Officers Association and AFL Physiotherapists Association, is that a free kick will now be awarded for any forceful contact below the knees (regardless of whether head, feet or knees first).

Rule 15.4.5(a)(ii) already states a free kick can be awarded for contact below knees, and as such a rule change is not required, but rather a stricter interpretation of the current law.

Aside from the injury prevention benefit, it is hoped that by encouraging players to keep their feet and discouraging players from going to ground in this way, it will also assist in reducing congestion.

Tyson Goldsack (Ankle)



Jamie Graham WAFL (Leg)



Scott Pendlebury (Leg)



Seb Tappe (Knee ACL)





### 3.2 Separation of rucks

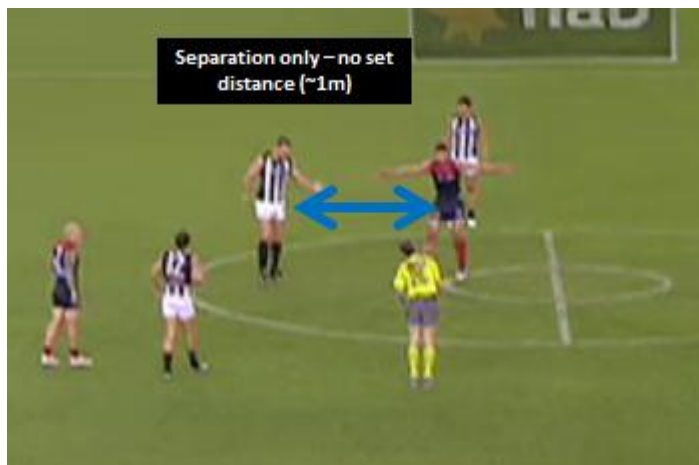
*Ruckmen will now be separated at stoppages, with no contact permitted until after the ball leaves the umpire's hand.*

The principle of adjudicating ruck contests has always been that both ruckmen should have the opportunity to jump unimpeded at a ruck contest with the aim of hitting the ball to their teammate.

There has been an increased prevalence of holding and wrestling at ruck contests around the ground in recent years. In the 2012 NAB Cup, a trial took place where the rucks were separated prior to the bounce or throw in, and not permitted to make contact until the ball had left the umpire's hand. A free kick was awarded against the first ruck to initiate contact prior to the ball being released. The aim was to encourage rucks to play the ball and not the man, facilitate cleaner hitouts to advantage and improve clearance rates.

The results from the trial were as follows:

- 2012 NAB Cup clearance rates 4.2% higher than 2012 Premiership Season and 3.8% higher than the 2011 NAB Cup
- 2012 NAB Cup secondary stoppages 4.2% lower than 2012 Premiership Season and 13.6% lower than the 2011 NAB Cup
- Reduced opportunity for third man up (2.4 less per game 2012 NAB vs. 2012 H&A)
- No adverse effect on time taken for stoppages
- Encouraged creative ruck play & reduced congestion around the stoppage



The rule will be interpreted as follows:

- Field umpires ensure rucks are separated prior to the ball being brought back into play
- Prior to the ruck contest, umpires will ensure rucks are separated (approximately 1m apart)
- Umpires will call for ruck nomination if there is uncertainty over who is the designated ruck at the stoppage
- If a team fails to nominate a ruck in this situation the umpire can award a free kick for failing to follow an umpires instruction (Rule 15.5(e))
- Other players in the vicinity are not to block the run of the rucks
- Body contact permitted only after the ball is released by the boundary umpire or thrown up by the field umpire
- Rucks who initiate contact prior to the release of the ball by the umpire will be penalised with a free kick to the opposing ruck
- Third man up (tactic where a player other than the ruck jumps over the rucks and attempts to hit the ball clear from the stoppage) is still allowable under this interpretation

### 3.3 Further changes

#### 3.3.1 Reducing congestion and/or making play more free flowing

- Throw the ball up around the ground to allow the ball to be released back into play quicker (2-3 seconds on average). This will save over 1 minute per game (increase % ball in play) and allow less time to set up stoppage structures. The centre bounce will remain. Other positive implications of throwing the ball up include greater visibility for umpires to detect holding at stoppages, better awareness for players of umpires around them to avoid contact as they will be upright and more visible. Centre bounces will continued to be taken by all three umpires to share the workload and support our assessment policy.
- Protect the ball player by awarding free kick for 'in the back' or 'high contact' against player who sits or lies on top of tackled player including if they end up in that position following the execution of a tackle (having an arm across is permitted).
- Stricter interpretation of holding the ball where player is tackled but doesn't make genuine attempt to kick or handball (including throwing/dropping/placing the ball).
- Free kick against a player for dragging or pushing the ball back under their opponent (as per previous NAB Cup trials).
- Stricter enforcement of protected area around the player with the ball
  - a) If in the protected area, opposition player must remain passive and will infringe if attempts to influence the play including putting arms in the air (consistent with Law 13.4 for delaying recommencement of play from a kick in); and
  - b) Can only enter protected area if within 2m of opponent, not if within 5m. The enforcement of the protected area rules are considered critical for encouraging play-ons/fast ball movement which have trended downward in recent years and are linked to contested marks and scoring.
- Reduce time allowed for kick ins to 5-6 secs (from when flags are waved) to be consistent with kicks around the ground. Estimated current time taken is approx. 7-8 seconds (approx. 1-2 min time saving).
- Other amendments to reduce "dead" time and increase % ball in play:
  - Further tighten the time taken to restart play following goals (approx. 27 sec saving per game by reducing time between goal and centre bounce by 1 sec)
  - Minimise delays due to blood rule by allowing replacement player to come on immediately after blood rule is indicated by umpire, and not allowing excess time for injured player to exit the field (but still allowing sufficient time to assist injury management).
  - Heavier sanctions for clubs not complying with quarter start times.
  - Stricter enforcement of 30 sec limit on set shots for goal.

### 3.3.2 Enhancing marking contests

The contested mark is one of the great features of Australian Football and is consistently among the top responses from supporters as to what they like most about the game.

One of the common themes among this year's laws meetings with coaching groups and players was the evolution of holding/blocking/checking tactics outside 5m against forwards. These tactics have become more sophisticated and may be contributing to the decrease in contested marks this year, as defenders look for ways to beat their opponent without infringing. Such tactics are unacceptable as we want to see players able to run and jump at the football.

In 2013 the umpires will focus on being tighter with paying free kicks for such infringements, and will review their positioning in games to achieve a better balance between eyes at the stoppage and eyes on the end zones (Note: in recent years the end zone umpires were directed to move closer to midfield stoppages to detect holding at stoppages – this has resulted in a significant increase in end zone free kicks for such infringements, but has also meant there are now infringements going undetected in the end zones).

In addition, there will be a further trial in the 2013 NAB Cup of boundary and goal umpires paying holding & high contact free kicks.

### 3.3.3 Minor amendments

- Recommencement of match following interruption (i.e. pitch invader) to be made consistent with current situation for a stretcher so the team in possession is not disadvantaged (if in possession – team keeps possession, if ball in dispute – ball up)
- Trainers only permitted on the ground following goals with boundary and goal umpires able to assist the field umpires in detecting trainer infringements
- Neutral colours for trainers/medical staff so the club coloured uniforms don't blend in with the player jumpers

### 3.3.4 Continued strict enforcement / Laws DVD focus

- Continued strict enforcement of rules designed to allow the team who has earned the ball to move it on quickly (protected area, cribbing, throwing ball back, holding after mark or free).
- Continued strict interpretation of deliberate out of bounds, especially walkovers when not under pressure and using spoils out on the full as one of the cues taken into consideration by the umpire. Trial free kick for last kick and handball out of bounds in 2013 NAB Cup. Continue with quicker throw ins and ball ups.
- Tactics to draw high contact free kicks have been discussed with clubs over the course of 2012. Various types of tactics to draw high contact were discussed including leading with the head, shrugging, ducking, dropping at the knees and use of the arm to move the tackler's arm high. The current adjudication should be maintained and monitored closely:
  - Play on called for leading with the head into a stationary player
  - Free kick awarded for any high contact, regardless of whether tackled player causes the contact to go high (onus on tackler to get lower)

## **4. 2013 NAB CUP**

### **4.1 *Format***

- 2013 NAB Cup trial rules to be used in Rounds 1-3, reverting to Premiership Season rules (including any trials that will be implemented in the 2013 Premiership Season) in the final round of practice matches and the NAB Cup Grand Final.

### **4.2 *Laws of the Game Changes***

#### **4.2.1 Interchange**

The Commission approved in principle a recommendation to impose a cap on interchange rotations, but determined that a review of further data and analysis was required, including a trial in the 2013 NAB Cup. Further details of the trial will be provided to the clubs in due course. Interchange arrangements will remain unchanged for the 2013 Premiership Season.

The rationale for further review and trial of a cap was:

- a) Injury (Management and incidence/prevalence)
- b) Fairness
- c) Congestion

- a) Injury

#### *Management*

The interchange was initially introduced to manage injured players and ensure fairness to competing teams in the event of an injury, however is now primarily used as a player rotation mechanism. At the current interchange average (131 per game), there is significant pressure on club doctors to swiftly assess and treat players (particularly in relation to concussion) to avoid an adverse effect on rotations.

Club doctors have indicated the implementation of the sub rule in 2011 has assisted substantially in the management of an injured player, but they are under increasing pressure to keep a second injured player going in some capacity. The view of the AFL Medical Directors and various independent experts is that the proposed interchange cap would have considerable benefit from an injury management perspective. This will be further assessed and monitored. A review of the in-game management and treatment of players suspected of suffering concussion will also be undertaken, including consultation with the AFL Medical Officers Association, to determine how best to manage this issue in the best interests of players.

#### *Incidence/Prevalence*

Published research conducted by Assoc. Prof John Orchard suggests that opposition injury risk increases significantly beyond the point of 80 interchanges per game. He asserts that a cap equalises team injury risk, is the fairest option and is likely to have a positive influence on overall injury prevalence. This relationship will be further investigated.

An added benefit of an interchange cap would be a likely reduction in the creation of high injury risk situations due to players being unaware of freshly rotated opponents impacting the play (ie Luke Breust, Rd 3 2012; Ed Curnow, Rd 17 2012). Requiring interchanges to be immediate will also assist with this.

## b) Fairness

The introduction of a substitute has assisted where a team suffers one injury, but teams are still disadvantaged by sustaining two injuries, where on average teams score 4 fewer points and concede 5 points more, with chances of winning down to 33% (Schembri & Bedford, 2011). This is a direct result of rotating players suffering a 33% reduction in average rest time (2.7 minutes reduced to 1.8 minutes), at a competitive disadvantage if their opponent has a full interchange bench.

The proposed 3/1 capped interchange structure retains the fairness benefit when a team loses a single player to injury. When a team suffers a second injury or an injury without a substitute available, average rest periods reduce from 4 minutes to 2.7 minutes. Although this is a 33% reduction in average rest time, it is equivalent to the average rest periods present under the current interchange rate, and thus is assumed that teams would have no issue maintaining this play/rest ratio. The competitive advantage to the opposition in this situation is also mitigated due to the equalisation of rotations in each quarter.

## c) Congestion

Evidence suggests there is a link between interchange and congestion. The more rest someone has the more power they can generate (human power curve), and speed confers a competitive advantage in most team sports because it leads to more game involvement. Fresher players can get to more contests, apply more defensive pressure in the form of congestion/zoning, and force a decreased quality of skill execution.

Because of the benefits, clubs have striven to maximise player power and thus game involvement through their use of the interchange. Every year clubs have suggested that interchange use had reached its natural limit, yet the average has continued to increase over that period of time including in 2012 where rotations have increased to 131 per team per game (compared with 81 per team five years ago – average increase of 13% per year) despite having one less player on the interchange. If the substitute rule had not been introduced in 2011 it is likely congestion would have increased further (Norton, 2012).

Quarter by quarter analysis of player GPS data and game statistics for 2011 and 2012 illustrate some of the trends associated with reducing player speed due to fatigue. When player speed is at its lowest in the second halves of games and last quarters, the game opens up, with attacking statistics (effective kicks, long kicks, contested marks, running bounces and scoring) more prevalent, and defensive statistics such as tackles and congestion less prevalent. It therefore follows that a restriction on interchange use would be likely to positively influence congestion throughout the game and attacking statistics. This relationship will be further examined.

### 4.2.2 Other NAB Cup changes

- Nine point super goal
- Boundary & Goal Umpires allowed to pay holding and high contact frees
- Deliberate OOB for any kick or handball OOB without being touched by another player
- Umpire coaches permitted to communicate with on-field umpires

All approved rule/interpretation changes for the 2013 Premiership Season will be trialled in the 2013 NAB Cup in addition to the NAB Cup only trial rules stated above.