

AFL talent scouts chase contested possessions, inside 50s

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“A range of skills are still needed to actually play the game, so players still need to be able to mark and run and sprint,” Mr Woods says. Credit: Michael Spencer

Wannabe AFL players should win contested possessions and deliver the ball inside 50 to give themselves the best chance of being drafted, research suggests.

A recent study followed 55 WA [players](#) competing in the National U18 AFL Championships, a competition used by talent scouts to assess the skills of junior players ahead of the AFL draft.

It examined disposals, marks, contested possessions, uncontested possessions, inside 50s and rebound 50s for each of the players and compared that to whether or not they were drafted by an AFL club.

The study spanned 2013 and 2014, years that saw the West Coast Eagles pick up Dom Sheed, Liam Duggan and Jackson Nelson and the Fremantle Dockers draft Michael Apeness and Alex Pearce.

James Cook University sports scientist Carl Woods, who led the study while working for the WA Football Commission, says contested possessions and inside 50s were both associated with draft success.

"A range of skills are still needed to actually play the game, so players still need to be able to mark and run and sprint," he says.

"But if you really want to improve your chances of getting drafted, to stand out a little bit more so to speak, we strongly suggest that players work on their contested [possessions](#) and their ability to win contested balls.

"And then obviously assist their team in winning by delivering the ball into the forward 50 more often than not, which hopefully results in an increased ability to score a goal and then win the game."

Physical condition doesn't impact draft chances

The research used GPS units to collect the total distance and relative distance (metres per minute) covered by the players in the games.

The study also considered the distance covered at high speed and the distance covered at high speed as a percentage of the total distance.

While previous research has found U18 players who are drafted have faster sprint times and greater aerobic capacities than their non-drafted counterparts, the paper found none of the physical characteristics measured during the games were associated with being drafted.

Mr Woods says every year in WA there are about 340 eligible U18s who could be drafted but usually only 5-10 per cent of those are actually picked up by clubs.

"The actual ability for players to get drafted into the AFL...it's pretty tough to do out of that entire cohort," he says.

Mr Woods says he often finds the best research questions come from the coaches.

More information: "What are talent scouts actually identifying? Investigating the physical and technical skill match activity profiles of drafted and non-drafted U18 Australian footballers." DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2015.04.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2015.04.013)

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