

On Thursday 20th May, the VAFAUA were fortunate enough to have former VAFA umpire and current AFL umpire Chris Donlon conduct a coaching session on the decision making process as field umpires. The footage we were shown was from several Premier and Premier B games from this season. Included in the footage were some very tough decisions that could be argued for numerous outcomes, some incidents that were not seen by the controlling umpire and well executed free kicks.

Whilst we had the benefit of slow motion replays to help analyse what happened in each incident but we do not have this resource on game day and must make the decision immediately as it is presented to the umpire. The slow motion replays do help us see the components of a free kick and what cues we should be looking for.

Some of the incidents viewed:

- A big bump in a marking contest (Old Trinity vs. Old Melbournians)

This footage saw three players contest a mark (two from Old Trinity and one from Old Melbournians) in which a player from each team collide heavily. The OT player who marks the ball is in front position; the other two both have eyes for the football the entire time. The umpire in this instance has a good side on position that allows him to see where the players are looking and an uninterrupted view of the contest. The impact of the players colliding is rather high and the important part in a situation like this is to not be reactive to the impact. It would be easy to be fooled to pay a free kick on instinct that two players have heavily collided when going for the ball, however, neither player has infringed as the contact is incidental and is front-side-on (not in the back) and neither player is hit above the shoulders (not too high). The umpire has remained calm and composed and waited a small amount of time to take everything into consideration and make the decision.

The things to consider in a marking contest:

- Was the player's objective the ball?
 - Was a player infringed against?
 - Was the mark controlled?
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- A hold in a boundary throw in (St Bedes/Mentone Tigers V Old Scotch)

In this contest the two ruckmen are contesting a boundary throw-in. Both players have vision for the ball and interlock arms with each other. The SBMT player then grasps the OS player's jumper and pulls him to make him become un-balanced and out of the contest. This incident should result in a free kick to OS for holding the man. Bearing in mind the umpire was in the correct position (20 metres away and side-on with vision at the player's front), the cues he/she should look for are:

- The players vision (are they looking at the ball? Is it their objective?)
- Any illegal contact (holding of jumper/high contact)
- Was any player prevented from contesting the ball?

- Contact to the head (Parkdale V Beaumaris)

In this footage we see the play near the boundary line when a Beaumaris player has his head over the footy attempting to gain possession of the ball and keep it in play. The player is met with contact to neck/head by a bump from a Parkdale player resulting in him to fall backwards. The contact looked ugly as this is dangerous and a very obvious free kick. Unfortunately the umpire in this instance was blinded by players between him and the players contesting the ball. Whilst we know what to look for in a high tackle (contact to the head/contact above the shoulder, protect the player whose sole objective is the ball), we discussed the decision making in relation to positioning near the boundary line. Had the umpire been in the right position the infringement would have more than likely been seen and the free kick would be paid. We are reminded that when the ball is near the boundary to:

- Maintain 20-25 metres from the play in a side-on position
- Concentrate on not waiting for the ball to cross the line, rather concentrate on the play; the boundary umpire will blow their whistle if the ball is out so don't worry about them and where the ball is
- Wait to get in position ready for a boundary throw-in after the boundary umpire has signalled the ball out (don't move closer to play in anticipation for the boundary umpire to blow his/her whistle)
- Circle the pack to ensure a clear view
- Make the next act of running a trigger point (whether the ball is kicked to another contest/free awarded or throw-in)