



HOW TO PLAY

In good HANDS

Ever wondered why Geelong star Cameron Ling is so quick and sure with his hands? By Howard Kotton.

It is hard to believe Cameron Ling is a right-hander because he is so proficient on his non-preferred side when he handballs. This is the result of years of practice in the backyard with his father Linton and brother David in Geelong.

“During my teenage years I made sure I learned how to handball both hands and kick both feet,” Ling said. “No matter how bad I was when I was younger, I used to handball on my left hand and get better and better at it – same with my right foot.

“When I moved into under-13s, under-15s and under-18s, it was more about doing everything as quick as I could. I tried to train myself under a bit of intensity, as if you were in a game.

“I think dad was the one I kicked the footy with the most. I mucked around with my brother a bit in the backyard. It was just that general ball skills. I just kicked the footy at lunchtime with my mates. When you came home you played around in the backyard.”

As a midfielder often winning the ball in contested situations, Ling said handball was an important part of his game and he spent plenty of time practising his skills each week.

“I do a lot of close-in, quick hands sort of stuff, as well as flicking up ground balls to someone running past,” he said. “We do indoor touch sessions, which involve a lot of handball and having to dish the ball off

PART 2 OF A SERIES ON HOW TO PLAY THE GAME – HANDBALL

In today's modern game, handball is a major attacking weapon as players run the ball from defence into attack. It is a skill that needs to be practised regularly and, by watching great handball exponents such as **Cameron Ling, Sam Mitchell** and **Scott West**, you can improve your game.

TEACHING POINTS

- The ball must be gripped lightly with the platform hand and hit with a clenched fist.

- The punching fist is formed by placing the thumb outside, not inside the fingers.
- The stance is nearly side-on to allow the punching arm to swing through freely. Knees are slightly bent to maintain balance.
- For a right-handed handball, the left foot is forward and vice versa for a left-handed handball.
- The punching arm is also slightly bent.

quickly off rebound nets. You've got to be able to take the ball cleanly in your hands and dish it off with a quick handball to a teammate.

“We practise the technique about how you gather the ball and protect yourself, so that you can turn and give the ball off and hit the target. We do work where you hit the longer handball target.”

When Ling takes possession, he makes a quick assessment of whether to kick or handball.

“If I'm in a position where I've got time and where I've got someone down the field, I'll always kick. If I'm in a contested situation and I'm about to be tackled and there's a teammate in a bit of space who can run and carry, I'll give the ball to him,” he said.

“Joel Corey and Jimmy Bartel are fantastic at it. If we win the contested situation, we want to get it to someone who is in space and

can either kick under no pressure or run and bounce.”

Growing up in Geelong, he marvelled at the handball skills of Greg Williams and Garry Hocking.

Since he started playing in the AFL, his role models in this skill have included Brisbane Lions stars Michael Voss and Simon Black, Western Bulldogs champion Scott West and former Carlton captain and current coach Brett Ratten.

“A lot of the good players are good in contested situations. ‘Vossy’ was very good and Simon Black is terrific,” he said.

“Garry Hocking always had a good balance between running and kicking-type options and getting the ball out to his teammates.

“Scotty West has always been very good, very quick hands.

“Brett Ratten was exceptional at it. You could think you had him covered, but the ball would be in and out of his hands before you knew it and away for his team.” ■



1 Ling is well balanced moving towards his target, with his body in a side-on position to allow the punching arm to swing through freely. His weight is moving forward over his right leg and his eyes are focused on the target. The ball is gripped lightly with the platform hand and is pointing towards the target. The fist of the punching hand is clenched, the thumb is outside the fingers and both arms are slightly bent. The fist of the punching hand is driving towards the end of the ball.

2 The eyes are still focused on the receiver and his weight is continuing to move forward. The striking fist has sent the ball in a direct line towards the target with some backspin (similar to a drop punt kick).

3 The punching hand continues to follow through towards the target and the stable head position has been maintained throughout. Ling is continuing to run on to follow up the handball and support the receiver.

• Technical advice courtesy of the AFL Development Department.