



## MAKING THE SMOTHER

North Melbourne captain Adam Simpson has pulled off a few spectacular smothers this season. He tells [Howard Kotton](#) how it is done.

Coaches often talk about the “one-percenters” that make a difference in a tight encounter.

Fans love to see their heroes making a desperate lunge at an opponent and the perfect smother can lift a side. North Melbourne captain Adam Simpson is one of the best exponents of this skill in the AFL.

“You don’t have to have talent to be good at smothering, it’s definitely a mindset,” Simpson said. “Everyone has got the ability to do something like that. When you see your teammate doing it, it just shows that you’re switched on and the team is willing to do anything to win the game.”

“For me, it’s the one when someone is on the run and you can do that big dive across the leg to smother the ball. The diving smothers to prevent a shot on goal are the ones you remember.”

While the Kangaroos do not practise the smother much at training, Simpson and his teammates get in a few in the rooms as a warm-up before games.

“We get a bit of body contact and do a few practice tackles, then do a few practice smothers, so we’re up and about for the game,” the Kangaroos captain said. “We get someone to kick the ball as hard as they can.”

Over his career, Simpson has played with some of the best exponents of the smother.

### PART 13 OF A SERIES – SMOTHERING

Smothering a kick or handball that saves a goal or creates a turnover, particularly one which results in a goal, can lift a team. Smothering ability, like all other skills, is developed through practice.

#### Executing an effective smother:

1. Get as close as possible to the player with the ball.
2. Hands are thrust straight out from the hip across the direction of the kick. They are not raised above the head and are brought down on the foot.
3. Hands are together and fingers are spread to maximise chances of making an effective smother.
4. Head is kept directly behind the hands and forearms for protection.
5. Eyes are fixed firmly on the ball to ensure the smother covers the ball and to improve chances of gaining possession after the ball has been smothered.

“Byron Pickett was probably one of the best. He was very good at anticipating when the ball was going to be kicked and timing it so the smother was pure.”

“Anthony Stevens used to do a couple of rippers every year. Glenn Archer has done a couple and I’ve seen Drew (Petrie) do them as well.”

Simpson said he would try to make a smother when it was too late to tackle an opponent.

“All you can do is prevent the disposal being effective and that’s when you might try to smother,” he said.

But the increased pace of the game and changes to the way AFL football is played has made it more difficult to smother the ball.

“You used to get quick kicks out of stoppages all the time, now a lot of teams are told to keep control of the football and perhaps handball it first or try to break out into the clear before you attempt to dispose of it,” he said. “I think

the technique has got a lot better, but it’s harder to get smothers in these days.

“Players are a lot quicker and they don’t like giving the ball up. If you get a couple of good ones in a game, you’re doing pretty well.”

Simpson said smothering the ball was a courageous act, but rated other “one-percenters” such as dropping back into the hole as more courageous.

But he said the smother was an important part of a player’s make-up.

“It’s probably just as important as your pressure and tackling,” he said. “It’s part of the one-percenters that everyone does.”

“You see a lot of players who do the smother all the time and you see some guys who never do it.”

“I think it just says a lot about you as a teammate. If you can rely on someone to do the little things like that, it lifts the team, a bit like running backwards with the flight of the ball.” ■



LIFTING THE TEAM: North Melbourne captain Adam Simpson demonstrates a classic smother.

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