

# TALKING TACTICS

By Peter Cornwall



Everything is planned to the letter.

And if the letter is not written pretty much perfectly, it's wiped off the whiteboard and written again.

Mark Stone knows there's no such thing as perfection – but that doesn't mean you shouldn't aim for it.

Stone set his sights high when he took on the job as Glenelg coach for the 2018 season. Like the incomparable Neil Kerley, the leader who turned the Tigers around in the late 1960s, Stone would never accept anyone not putting everything into what they were doing, not giving themselves the best possible chance to achieve the best possible outcome.

And Stone certainly put his heart and soul into everything he did at the Bay. Like it was with Kerls, it was the start of something big. All the planning, all the preparation, all the perfectly-written instructions that filled the whiteboard, all were worth it in that famous moment immortalised by Gordon Anderson's photo, when Stone, arms raised in triumph, pretty much falls into the arms of Michael Virgin a split-second after the siren sounded to end the 2019 grand final.

It wasn't just about preparation with Stone, either. His match day coaching was phenomenal. He had what almost appeared a sixth sense with his ability to read the game from up in the coaches' box. He could see, simultaneously, which Glenelg players weren't sticking to his side's highly-planned structures, which opposition players were about to, or were, causing problems that needed to be countered, to keep an eye on who was coming or going from the interchange benches of both sides and, because of his remarkable understanding of everything that was going on, he had an almost eerie ability to be able to predict what was about to unfold.

Darcy Bailey loves the tactics of modern footy. It's a trait he inherited from his late father Dean, a former Glenelg club champion who was a highly-regarded AFL coach. Darcy loved what Stone brought to the club in 2018, thrived amid the structures, system and statistics Stone had at his fingertips and rode the wave to grand final glory.

"A genius," is how Bailey described his ability to strategise, read the game and quickly react to it, while also motivating his charges. There are few mentors who have all these qualities. "I probably didn't realise how much an impact a really good coach can have."

TIGERS 2017

100% EFFORT - EVERY TIME  
 BODY ON LINE  
 NEVER BACK DOWN + NEVER GIVE UP  
 CARE FOR YOUR MATES  
 GIVE HONEST FEEDBACK \*

ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE A 2<sup>ND</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> EFFORT

N.N  
 N.S  
 U.S  
 M.F

OFFENCE  
 ↓  
 WHAT'S NEXT  
 ↓  
 DEFENCE  
 +  
 PRESSURE

KICK INS 31 21

STRUCTURES

CSB: 3-2-1 KING 8 6 10  
 NO BACK FEED (45)

MID: STOCK  
 KEEP 6 + STALK  
 PARTO 2 OPTIONS:

F50 EXPOSE COVER

**FORWARDS**

2 PLAY HIGH - 1 KF + 1 SF  
 DELAY EXIT + MORE JOIN

14 + 24  
 (13 + 24)  
 (24 + 10) } FORCE WIDE + THEY WILL FLOOD

14 IS KEY - BEST OVERHEAD  
 47 IS X FACTOR - GOOD MARK (NO W.R) - PLAYS FROM BEHIND/WILL PLAY DEEPEST

**MIDS**

WINGERS ARE KEY 19 + 34  
 FOLDBACK - SUPPORT DSO + OUTLET  
 WILL GET FORWARD + CAN SCORE

ONE PACED

19 GOES INSIDE ON MID ROTATION

30 + 28 KEY @ STOPPAGES  
 1 TAGS + GOOD SPREADER } ONE PACED  
 9 INSIDE + WING

— SPEED OUT OF CONTEST HURTS THEM BUT CAN'T GET PAST THE BALL

**BACKS**

NOT BIG + PLAY 'OFF' TO INTERCEPT  
 RELY ON PRESSURE UPFIELD

45 HIGHEST - CSB + STOPPAGE FLUSH  
 44 TAKES RESTING MID OR S.F.  
 12/40 DEEPEST - BOTH ROLL OFF  
 27 PLAYS OFF + BACKS HIMSELF TO READ BALL

\* ALL PRESS UP HIGH + FEED OFF COLLAPSING PLAYERS } CAN GET THROUGH INTO PADDOCK FROM POST KICKS  
 PORT DONT ALWAYS GET DEPTH

\* ROLL BACK IN LINE + OUTNUMBER

**CONSIDERATIONS**

SMALL FWDS 31 IN 25/38 OUT  
 TALL FWDS 31 IN 47/36 OUT

— WE NEED A TALL ON 1/C 4 BIGS 19 31 5 +

— 45 FWD WHEN KF ROTATE \*

— WORK ROTATIONS FOR 4 WINGERS

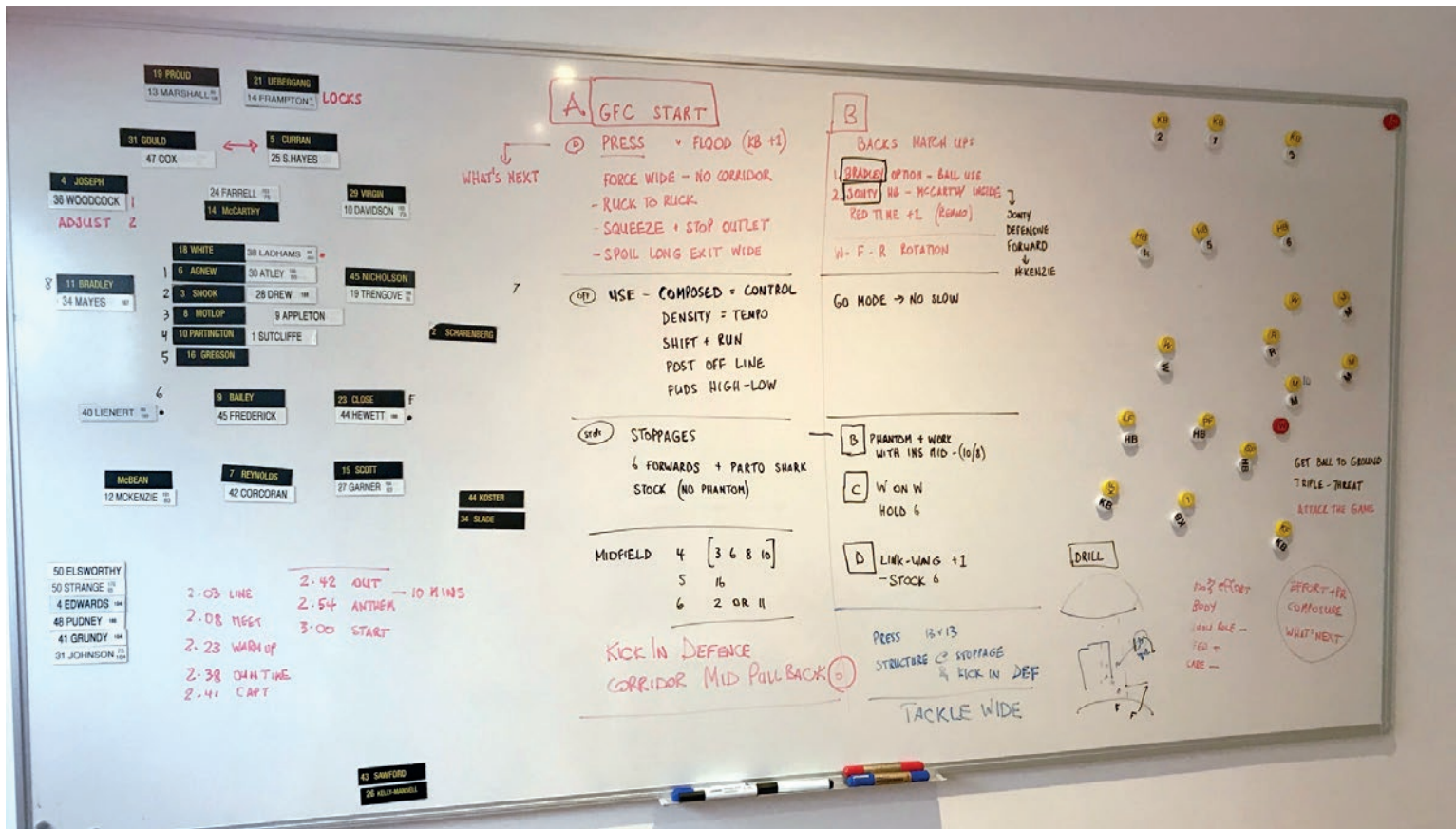
— 6 + 2 TO DREW - MUST PUSH @ STOPPAGE (ROTATION)

TAG 1v2<sup>s</sup> / REL W / DUMP OUT + USE SPEED  
 CUZ - STAY HIGH - STAND IN FRONT OF KF @ ST

MID FLEX

How the Bays went about winning the 2019 grand final against Port Adelaide. The meticulous planning of coach Mark Stone was carried out to the letter.





‘All In’, ‘Discipline’ and ‘Tough’ were becoming habits and “we just went bang”, winning the last six games of the season, setting the side up for a major push in 2019.

And there were more numbers involved. “We tried to keep teams under 70 (points) – that was our rule,” Bailey said. In the first five of those six successive wins Stone’s men did just that, while, in the sixth, reigning back-to-back premier Sturt finished on 80 but Glenelg ended up with 85.

There were other KPIs the Tigers had to hit. One was contested ball, the magic number being 148 for a game. “If we got that we were at least in the game ... giving ourselves a chance to win it.” Kicks should be between 200-220 with handballs 120-130.

“Obviously, two to one is the perfect ratio if you can get that,” Bailey said. Stone’s philosophy was you would only use handball to set up the kicker and then you kicked ... over-handball and you would just get yourself into trouble.

“When we started winning those games it was like, from then on you could see the game plan that he wanted to do was working.”

Stone continually pushed “reliable over remarkable” and good habits and strong belief snowballed in 2019, the Tigers charging headlong towards their drought-breaking flag. When Stone made a move or told players what to do “it’s like bang, yep, we’re doing it,” Bailey said, not because Stone was a strong disciplinarian but “because you had that much confidence in what he was doing”.

Stone had come from an AFL environment in which players were professional and could be called on at all times for tactical meetings, reviews

and training sessions. And footy remained all-consuming for Stone at the Bay. “He loves it. He can’t get enough of it,” Bailey said. “At 7.30 on a Sunday morning an email would come through and he’s put some footage up, at 11 o’clock another night, he’s put something up ...he left no stone unturned.”

The constraints and demands of coaching in the SANFL took some getting used to but Stone knew not to overload his players, who were working for a living, with too much information in the short time he had to work with them.

“He had this huge attention to detail but he would know how much information to give you in any meeting,” Bailey said. “He would know at a Thursday night meeting probably 10 minutes would be the max he would get out of them. He would tell you some of the tactics, then he would intentionally hold off and on game day he would add in another one or two things. So it was fresh in your mind.”

While his tactical nous and reading of the game is elite, Bailey said Stone also was “incredibly motivating”. His passion was infectious and “he would find a way to bring up a story and have a theme for the week ... even old stories of his own.”

“You would leave the room thinking, ‘let’s go,’” Bailey said. “His speeches were just brilliant.” There was always a clear theme or message “to get everyone up and about”.

Stone could be ruthless and “at the start it probably shocked a few people”. But Bailey has no doubt the squad was well-and-truly ready for what the single-minded, straight-shooting new coach brought to the table.



“We had a group of about 12 Glenelg players, who had been there for seven or so years, then you add in a couple of young guys who are potentially getting drafted and bring in a few imports or ex-AFL guys and he was just the perfect coach to come in at that time with the tactical side if it.”

The ‘Triple Threat’ in the forward line was another barometer for success. It was the total of marks, tackles and ground balls inside 50m. “I think there was a stat that, if it was below 40, we would potentially lose but if it was above 40, every time we had won.” Bailey was playing as a small forward, and trying to lift the Triple Threat tally to 40 every week kept him motivated. “It was good having that goal. I was like, we’ve got to crumb and get the ground ball and chase and tackle and if we can get 10 a quarter, if we can get those stats, we know we are going to win.”

Stone, who studied footage to learn everything you possibly could about the opposition’s strength and weaknesses and game style, could think on his feet when things went wrong. His preparation for game day included a list of ‘what-ifs’, in other words, a Plan B plenty of coaches in recent times have been criticised for not having.

He adapted to whatever was happening on the field quickly, never waiting for quarter-time or half-time but making decisive adjustments.

So, by the time the 2019 grand final came around, the whiteboards full of meticulously recorded colour-coded instructions were anything but daunting for Stone’s men, who had learned so much in two years and come so far.

“It had become habit,” Bailey said of knowing their roles and following their instructions. “We were used to that.”

It was one of those good habits. It was a winning one.

		YES	NO
1.	100% EFFORT EVERY TIME	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	KNOW YOUR ROLE & PLAY YOUR ROLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.	BODY ON THE LINE - NEVER BACK DOWN - NEVER GIVE UP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	CARE FOR YOUR MATES - SWEEP THE SHEDS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	GIVE HONEST FEEDBACK - EDUCATE & ACT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
OVERALL GAME		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Top: Even after they had won the grand final, coach Mark Stone went through a review of the game in the Adelaide Oval changerooms. You reckon the players would have enjoyed what they heard this time. *Photo: Gardan Anderson*

Above: The players' self-evaluation sheets were all about honest feedback, one of Mark Stone's mantras.