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Batting

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Batting - Place and Run!!!

- By Polly Umrigar

MODES OF DISMISSALS

There are ten ways in which a batsman can lose his wicket:

- 1 : Bowled
- 2 : Caught
- 3 : Handled the ball
- 4 : Hit the ball twice
- 5 : Hit wicket
- 6 : LBW
- 7 : Obstructing the field
- 8 : Run out
- 9 : Stumped
- 10 : Time out

THE ART OF PLACING THE BALL

It is unwise for a batsman to specifically make up his mind where he will be hitting a ball even before it is bowled, unless the circumstances are exceptional, like a specialist batsman wanting to keep the strike with a tail-ender at the other end, or a situation wherein a team needs to accelerate with several wickets in hand.



Inzamam-ul-Haq (right)
Not the best runner between
wickets, but one of the best 'placers' of a cricket ball

At the time of taking strike, the batsman should know the exact position of every fielder. Only then will he be mentally conditioned to placing the ball in the right areas.

The batsman should adjust his shots to give the greatest yield. There is no point in thrashing hard drives straight to the men in the covers and not getting any runs, when the same deliveries could have been played on either side of the fielders with soft hands, and the batsmen would have got ones or twos.

The art of placing the ball in the right areas can be acquired through match-practice. It cannot be learnt and mastered overnight.

A fast scorer is not one who slogs. A 'slogger' is bound to fail most of the time. On the other hand, a batsman who is constantly looking for scoring opportunities will come out on top. He who concentrates on picking up singles by punching the ball through the gaps will be more successful.

RUNNING BETWEEN THE WICKETS

Watching two batsmen steal cheeky singles from right under the noses of the fielding side can be an exhilarating experience for a cricket spectator.

Good and effective running between the wickets is a matter of judgment and experience. It is generally accepted that the striker is responsible for calling when the ball is hit in front of the wicket, whilst the non striker shall make the call when a stroke is made behind the wicket. Either party must obviously have the right to deny the partner's call if he thinks it is too dangerous. In such cases, it is important that the denial of the call be loud, clear and prompt. Under all circumstances, the initial call by the striker or non striker should be "Yes" or "No", and "Wait" if there is any uncertainty.

If the ball is stroked to third man (behind the wicket) and the batsmen set off for a run, the non-striker while crossing his partner should tell him whether a second run is possible or not, as the ball will be in his direct line of vision.

While taking runs, a batsman should pay due regard to the running speed of his partner. It is essential to ensure that each run is just as safe for the partner as it is for him.



It's not a ghost, it's Sourav! - Tendulkar (right) and Ganguly steal a quick single against England at Leeds, 2002.

The non-striker should 'back up' as the bowler runs in to deliver the ball. His feet should be outside the popping crease when the bowler releases the ball. However, his bat should be grounded within the crease. The bowler can run him out before releasing the ball if he discovers that the non-striker has 'backed up' too far and hasn't kept his bat grounded within the crease. The non-striker should always stand slightly wide of the stumps.

While completing a run, the batsman should ground the bat short of the popping crease and slide it over.

The first run should always be run fast.

Once the first run has been completed and a batsman is in the process of turning for a second, he should always turn towards that side of the ground on which the ball is struck, to check how far it has gone and how close a fielder might have got to it.

Quick singles can upset the bowler and fielders. Shrewd batsmen are known for making mental notes. They figure out who among the fielders are agile, who are slow, who have good throws, who struggle to make quick returns, and who are right-handed / left-handed.

Even if a run-out looks inevitable, a batsman who is sprinting between wickets should never ever give up. Many a batsman has made his ground safely because the wicketkeeper or bowler or fielder has fumbled with the ball in his excitement to run the batsman out, or a fielder has made a wild throw.

If the bat is dropped accidentally while running, one should carry on running instead of stopping and picking it up!

If a specialist batsman and tail-ender are at the crease, the latter should sacrifice his wicket if there is a run-out situation. This also applies when there are two specialist batsmen in the middle. A batsman who might be struggling to time the ball should sacrifice his wicket if his partner has settled down the crease and is playing confidently.

A runner if requisitioned should ground his bat within the popping crease

On the Back-Foot and Behind - Batting - Part IV

- By Polly Umrigar

THE PULL

The Pull should be attempted to a ball that is pitched short. No batsman should attempt to pull a ball that is over pitched or of good length, as this will lead to disaster.

In executing this shot, one has to go back and across with the right foot so that the right toe is pointing almost straight down the pitch towards the bowler. Then as the ball comes along, it should be pulled hard to mid-wicket, at the same time pivoting the body, keeping the legs fairly apart and rolling the wrists over to keep the ball on the ground. This stroke is particularly effective against leg-break and off-break bowlers.

THE HOOK



Virender Sehwag
essays the hook shot

The hook shot could be applied to a ball delivered with some speed, pitched short either on the stumps or on the leg-side.

The batsman should 'hook' the ball behind square-leg after stepping inside the line of flight. To play the hook, he should move back and across with the right foot and as the ball rises towards his chest or shoulder, swing it away somewhere between square-leg and the wicketkeeper. He should not try to hit the ball very hard as there is every chance of his mistiming the same and offering a catch.

FORCING SHOT OFF THE BACK FOOT

A ball short of a good length that is pitched on the stumps and is not short enough to pull, can be 'forced' off the back foot past the bowler.

It is a relatively safe shot, but demands great power from the wrists and forearms and immaculate timing. The initial movement is similar to that for a back defensive stroke, except that the right foot should be taken backwards rather straighter. This is to lend more power to the shot. The left hand becomes really a guide. Power is generated from the right hand in co-ordination with the wrists and forearms.

This shot is usually essayed while trying to play the ball back past the bowler. It can also be

dispatched to wide of mid-on by hitting slightly across the line. It can also be played in the cover-extra cover region.

LEG-GLANCEST

There are two leg-glances

I. BACKWARD LEG-GLANCE

A batsman should attempt this shot if he is confident that the ball will pass clear of the leg-stump if it misses the bat. Otherwise, he will run the risk of being out leg-before wicket.



Chris Gayle demonstrates the left-hander's version of the forward leg-glance in a one-dayer against England.

The right foot should be moved back and across in front of the stumps with the right toe pointing down the pitch. Contact should be made with the ball a few inches in front of the left leg.

This acts as a useful safeguard against a possible catch by the wicketkeeper if the shot is played too fine.

Here, the left hand plays the part of keeping the handle slightly in front of the blade (tilted), and the right hand dictates the turning movement of the bat to acquire the required deflection. Dropping the right hand down the handle at the moment of impact will enable the batsman to control the stroke better.

II. FORWARD LEG-GLANCE

A forward leg glance demands that the ball should be a half-volley or fuller than a good length. The posture is the same as that for the on-drive, except that here the bat turns at the moment of impact and deflects the ball behind the wicket, as opposed to the on-drive that is played with a straight bat.

The head and shoulder should be kept forward and down, the bat inclined forward, hands ahead of the blade to make sure that the ball is glanced downwards and not in the air. If desired, the right hand may go down the handle to assist control.

THE SWEEP



Pakistan's Yousuf Youhana executes the sweep in a Test match against Sri Lanka

The sweep is played simply by advancing the front leg down the pitch and swinging at the ball with almost a horizontal bat so that the ball will in effect be 'swept' behind square-leg.

The ball should be hit along the ground and this is achieved by rolling the wrists over at the time of execution of the stroke, and by keeping the bat slightly over the line of flight.

While playing this shot, one must make sure that front foot is correctly positioned, especially when facing a leg-spin bowler.

ODI's Action and Adaptation - Batting I

- By SP. Bhatia

Limited-overs cricket is a little different from the longer version. The skills, strategies and attitude required to succeed vary a bit from those demanded by the traditional variety. This is why some great Test players fail to become great one-day players and teams with fantastic Test records struggle in ODIs. Cricket is a game played as much in the mind as on the field, and it involves a 'comfort zone'. This 'comfort zone' is dependent on the strategies and beliefs of the team. Some teams, for instance India, believe that they are better off setting a target for the opposition and defending it. Batting first is their 'comfort zone'. On the other hand, some teams like the West Indies team of the 1970s and Sri Lanka of the mid-90s believe in sending the opposition in and restricting them to a low score.

BATTING

This word in limited-overs game means nothing but destruction for many batsmen - destruction of the bowler's psyche and the opposing team as a whole. But aggression without control and common sense is futile. Not everybody can be a Sehwag or a Gilchrist. Hence, other finer aspects of batting should be viewed.

- 1: Taking quick singles.
- 2: Running between wickets - judging a run.
- 3: Placing the ball in the right areas (gaps)

4: Creating angles

I cannot think of a better example than current Australian captain Ricky Ponting for proficiency in the first two areas. Not only is he quick between the wickets, but he is also a magnificent judge of a run. The art of Running between wickets is not only deciding whether you will reach the other end, but also determining whether your partner will make it. It's all about 'completing' the run, not merely 'taking' it. Mohammed Azharuddin was a class apart as far as placement and angle-creation was concerned. He was adept at leaving bowlers awestruck with his wristwork.

BATTING FIRST - THE STRATEGY:

A team batting first in an ODI should decide its strategy on the basis of its 'comfort zone'.

I. Going hammer-and-tongs in the first 15

There are only two fielders in the outfield in the first 15 overs. This means that if you have big-hitters in your ranks, then you can really benefit from going for the shots in the initial overs. But it is important to mix caution with aggression. Players who are fearless and possess the ability to hit over the top are invaluable for this gameplan. But a belligerent approach can be a risky one. It might give your team a flying start, say 100-0, but at the same time, if you play recklessly, there could be a collapse and the score could be a disastrous 40-4 after 15 overs. This strategy also depends on the type of players in the middle-order. If the middle-order is strong enough to weather the storm of early wickets and not get bogged down, then the risk is worth taking. The present Australian middle-order is a master at this. The Indian middle-order has also pulled off some rescue acts in the recent past, although not against Australia!

II. Laying a solid base



Ricky Ponting

An alternative to destructive aggression is 'passive' aggression; aggression in approach, running between the wickets, punishing the loose deliveries and capitalizing on the missed chances of the opposition. In this approach, the scoring graph will show a consistency, apart from probably the slog overs at the end of the innings. Followers of this approach believe that 50 overs is a long period. Conservation of wickets in the first 30-35 overs will ensure that the team has plenty of wickets in hand

when the last 15 overs begin. This will enable the batsmen to go bang-bang, and a big total will be a foregone conclusion. Australia adopted this strategy in the 1987 World Cup, as did Pakistan in the 1992 edition. It is not a coincidence that both teams won!

III. Capitalizing on the opposition's weaknesses

More often than not, teams play only four specialist bowlers, unless they have quality all-rounders. The part-time bowlers fill the fifth bowler's slot and bowl ten overs in the middle stages of the innings. The batting team naturally looks to attack these part-timers and score at least 6-7 runs from their ten overs.

Batting - The psychological demands

- By SP. Bhatia

The psychological demands of the varied aspects of cricket are numerous, and more so for batsmen.

One mistake and the batsman is back in the pavilion. These demands vary in amount and type at different batting positions. An opener should be quick to react to the missiles hurled by the fast bowlers and be a good judge of the line and length. On the other hand, a middle-order batsman needs to look after other aspects. He should be able to alter his game depending on the match situation. He may either need to attack to stamp his team's authority or drop anchor in the event of a collapse.



A rare occurrence - Sachin Tendulkar reverse-sweeping in a Test match. He normally plays this stroke in the one-day internationals

Rarely does a batsman play all the shots that are part of his repertoire. This is a sign of the mind winning over matter. The temptation of playing all the shots in his armory is sometimes too much, but a good player will be able to curb himself and avoid essaying the high-risk shots. For instance, we all know how attacking a player Sachin Tendulkar is. But over the years, he has cut down on the cheeky little risky shots that he used to play in the first half of his career. He may not be as exciting to watch, but he is certainly more effective. The longer he stays at the wicket, the worse it gets for

his opponents. This holds true for the longer version of the game as well. But this is the age of instant cricket.

This brand of cricket again puts different demands on the players. The batsmen have to be able to adapt to the one-day format. The shots that Tendulkar or Dravid would not even think of playing in the Tests, they would play in one-day internationals. Two strokes that come to mind immediately are the reverse sweep and the 'uppercut' over third-man for six.

'Motivation' is a big and powerful word, and extremely essential from the batting point of view. A living example of motivational power is our very own Rahul Dravid. A few years back, he was struggling to retain his place in the one-day side despite possessing a rich technique and the ability to play all the strokes. It is sheer motivation that enabled him not only to cement his place, but also go from strength to strength and finally become the super batsman he is regarded as today.



Rahul Dravid - Motivation and concentration

Another critical attribute is 'Concentration'. A batsman who can concentrate for long hours is most likely to succeed at the highest level. Here again, the first name that comes to mind is Rahul Dravid, an epitome of concentration. With concentration, a batsman can perform in tight situations, ignore the glare of the bowlers and the harsh words of the fielders. Without concentration, one simply cannot bat for a particular length of time.

Emotions, they say, make you weak. True as far as batting is concerned. Of all the emotions, frustration, nervousness and elation are most commonly experienced.

I. A player can get frustrated when he is not able to score quick runs needed by the team. Inability to rotate the strike often leads to the batsman getting out.

II. A little bit of pre-match nervousness is good to have. But if this nervous energy is brought onto the crease, the batsman invariably falls prey to a quality opposition bowler.



Virender Sehwag -
Self-belief and confidence.

III. So often do we see a batsman getting out after a landmark is achieved. This happens when the feeling of elation and a sense of achievement are carried to the next ball bowled.

The confidence of being one of the best in the business is a tool that a batsman can be proud to possess. A confident batsman is sure of his goals, plans and how he wants to execute those plans. On the other hand, a less confident batsman is hesitant, unsure and actually fearful of failure. Virender Sehwag illustrates what self-confidence can do to a cricketer. The lad does not have a technique as faultless as say Dravid's. But he has self-belief and tons of confidence. He backs his ability to succeed, and boy, hasn't he succeeded!

It is thus pretty evident that there is a great deal more to batting than just a good technique. A batsman wins or loses his battles in the mind.

Preparation for a game - Opening the Innings

- By SP. Bhatia

It will be safe to say that cricket is more a mental game than a physical one. Many players who have had some limitations on the technical front have succeeded at the international level due to their mental toughness and temperament. Steve Waugh is an appropriate example in that regard. Mental toughness makes 'great' players out of 'good' players.

Hence, it is necessary to prepare oneself mentally before every match. The preparation can begin by developing a routine before every match or every practice session. This will help develop a positive mind-set. However, this routine should provide for flexibility. Lack of the ability to adapt to changing situations can prevent a player from realizing his fullest potential.

Apart from normal practice, one should include relaxation and 'mental practice' into one's routine. Breathing, the core of yoga, is the best relaxation activity that can be practiced before taking the crease.

Another aspect of preparation is to be aware of the opponents' strategy against you, and to try and

'out-think' them.

Each position in the batting order has its own special mental demands. Of course, the match-situation influences this demand. For opening batsmen as well as tail-enders, there is scope to sharpen their skills by understanding the basic details of the game. Mental toughness and sharpness allow a player to comprehend these details better.

OPENERS



Matthew Hayden 'meditating' on the pitch on the eve of a game.

An opening batsman must be courageous and have the ability to react quickly against fast or medium-pace bowlers. Openers like Sunil Gavaskar and Geoff Boycott were masters in handling the pressures of opening, and adept at building long innings.

The fast bowlers will try to unnerve the openers through physical intimidation with a battery of short-pitched deliveries. Openers must have the courage, resilience, and self-belief to play this type of bowling. They ought to stay composed and try to rotate the strike. This will reduce the bowlers' effectiveness in applying constant pressure.

The openers must aim to play through the entire first session without losing a wicket. This calls for a high level of concentration and the dealing of each delivery on merit. Openers very often receive unplayable deliveries. It is essential that they learn to forget about them and focus on the next delivery.

The openers have to perform four different roles depending upon the situation.

- To see through the new ball
- To attack the bowlers when they are worn out
- To support the attacking middle-order batsmen
- To steady the boat if an early wicket falls.

All these roles require different mindset and physical demands.

STARTING AN INNINGS



Steve Waugh - one of the all-time greats.

A batsman is most likely to be dismissed at the very beginning of his innings, when he is new to the crease and hasn't got his eye in. One mistake and he could be cooling his heels in the pavilion. No matter how benign the wicket may be, or mediocre the opposition maybe, there will be some amount of nervousness in the batsman, due to the apprehension of getting out first ball. Here, it is important for the batsman to control his emotions. It is natural and important to feel the adrenalin flowing, but striking a balance is important, which means that although he may be edgy, he should be able to control his movements and thoughts. Routine again plays an important role here. Usually all batsmen, particularly openers, have a routine that they follow unconsciously.

Hayden, the most prolific opener of the modern era, is one who comes to mind immediately. He not only 'meditates' on the pitch the day before the match, but also follows a ritual during the match, which involves squatting on the pitch after taking guard. Different openers have different methods. Nobody was supposed to talk to Sunil Gavaskar ten minutes before he went in to bat.

The other 'positions' in the batting order will be dealt with in the subsequent article.

The Art of Batting - III

- By Polly Umrigar

In the Late cut, the right foot should be moved outside the off stump and the weight of the body transferred onto it.

It is unsafe to try this stroke against fast bowlers and off spinners, but against medium pace or leg-break bowlers, there is a good chance of reward.

In this shot, the wrist plays an important part, but the balls own momentum is the chief source of speed. The stroke is a short and snappy one and does not have a long swing of the bat.

[J] THE SQUARE CUT

There are two square cuts - one played off the front foot and the other off the back foot. In both these strokes the ball must be short and wide of the off stick.



Rahul Dravid essays the back-foot square-cut

Square cut off the front foot:-

The left leg should be advanced forward and across the wicket, so that it finishes with the toe directed towards cover and the left leg carrying the full weight. To make this shot, the ball should be short-pitched and away from the off-stump. The shoulder at the start of the swing should be pointing towards mid-off so that the maximum power can be put into the swing. The shoulders turn only with the impetus of the hit, which should be made with full force of the right hand, forearm and shoulders. The ball should be hit down and not cut into the air. The ball should go just backward of cover.

Square cut off the back foot:-

This shot is more in play than the one off the front foot as it gives more time to the batsman to see the ball. This time, it is the right foot that is thrown across and the weight is transferred to the right leg. The knee should be flexed to slightly assist -

balance. The most common fault that a batsman makes while playing this shot is that he leans towards the on-side, as a result of which the ball flies and ends in the hands of the slips or gully. It is better to be closer to the ball than too far away.

Playing this stroke to off-spinner can be extremely dangerous if the ball is turning.

[K] FORWARD DRIVES

- Cover drive
- Off drive
- Straight drive
- On drive
- Lofted drive

A batsman will normally attempt to drive a ball that is slightly over-pitched so that he may not loft the ball. The left shoulder must lean forward. The left hip too must go well forward as the weight is transferred onto the front foot. The distance a batsman needs to advance his left foot down the pitch depends on the length of the ball and the type of bowler.



Inzamam-ul-Haq
plays the cover drive

For the cover drive, the left toe should point towards cover and then it would progressively point a little more directly towards the bowler for the other drives, round to mid-on. For instance, it should point towards mid-off for the off-drive, towards the bowler for the straight drive, and towards mid-on for the on-drive.

The left leg must carry the weight of the body at the moment of contact, but it should be comfortably bent at the knees to maintain balance. In all cases, the right heel should be lifted and the right leg balanced on the toe, which is kept clearly behind the popping crease.

The ball must be struck just before the bat becomes perpendicular to the ground in order to keep it on the ground. The lofted drive is used to either upset a spin bowler or when one has to go for the runs. However, this shot should be used with discretion.

[I] JUMPING OUT TO DRIVE

When a slow bowler is operating and is giving the ball a reasonable amount of air by tossing it up, he is naturally doing this to try to get more turn on the ball. The batsman's job is to counter this idea and one of the best ways in which to do this is to use the feet and go down the wicket to attack the bowling, either hitting it on the half volley or full toss to prevent the spin from taking effect.

The Art of Batting - II

- By Polly Umrigar

THE STANCE - POSITION

Watching down the pitch from the bowlers end, the batsman's toe should be just about in line with the leg stump. Some batsmen rest their bat behind the right toe. This encourages straighter back lift and sounder for defense play. The left shoulder should be pointing down the pitch or very nearly so with the head turned so that both eyes are clearly focused on the bowler. The batsman should try and be relaxed and comfortable.

[E] BACK LIFT

Many coaches teach their pupils the necessity of taking one's bat back perfectly straight. But actually, many players fail because their thoughts are concentrated on where their elbow is or where the bat is instead of playing the ball. The player who uses the crease area and takes the bat backwards absolutely straight would find himself out hit wicket.

So long as the batsman is in the right position at the time of playing the ball, I do not think any thing can go wrong, even if his bat comes down from the first slip.

Whether the bat is taken back straight towards the stumps or towards first slip, one should ensure that it is not too high. The backlift should be no higher than is necessary for a proper balance between control in defence and power in attack.

Some coaches teach right-handed batsmen players to take the bat back with the left hand. Due to this a defensive complex starts to build up. The right hand should also predominate sometimes - in the pull shot for instance, and the left hand, especially in defence.

[F] FOOTWORK

What is meant by the term 'footwork'?

The answer - Movement of the feet, so as to be in the right position with plenty of time to spare. Footwork should have a requisite speed and should be coordinated with perfect judgment.

Footwork is certainly one of the keys to batsmanship; it is to batting what foundation is to a house. Without it, there can be no structure.

[G] BACKWARD DEFENCE

When playing back defensively, the bat in its downward path should pass just outside the right pad as it comes forward to meet the ball.



VVS Laxman executes the backward defensive shot in the nets.

Coinciding with the initial movement of taking the bat back, the right foot must be moved back and across in front of the stumps. The left foot should be automatically brought across so that the stumps are completely protected.

The toe of the right foot should point towards the extra cover or mid-off region. The full weight of the body should be taken on the right foot. The right hand slides down to the bottom of the handle, to give added Control. Try to play the ball towards the bowler or mid-on rather than towards cover. For a rising ball, the right hand should be left loose.

Keep the head well over the line of flight and down. Lifting the head is fatal and generally results in cocking the ball up or hitting it on the edge.

Both the backward and forward defence should be practised in front of a mirror.

[H] FORWARD DEFENCE

This type of defensive stroke should be used when the ball is pitched farther up than a good length. There is not much of a backlift and the bat has to be kept absolutely perpendicular. The handle of the bat should be kept forward of the blade in order to keep the ball down.

The batsman should always play close to the front leg, so that the ball cannot get between bat and pad. The left shoulder and elbow should lean forward towards the pitch of the ball and drag the front foot and body forward.

The left knee should be bent slightly to hold the weight of the body in balance and the left toe should be pointed towards cover, mid-off or the bowler, varying it according to the direction of the ball.

Keep the head well forward and down. The right toe must be kept firmly behind the batting crease to avoid being stumped. In forward defence, the left hand is in control, the right hand grip becomes a thumb and first two fingers should be placed at the bottom of the handle.

The left hand should be over the handle. The left hand at the back of the handle curbs any tendency to follow through.

[I] LATE CUT

When a slow bowler is operating and is giving the ball a reasonable amount of air by tossing it up, he is naturally doing this to try to get more turn on the ball. The batsman's job is to counter this idea and one of the best ways in which to do this is to use the feet and go down the wicket to attack the bowling, either hitting it on the half volley or full toss to prevent the spin from taking effect.

The Art of Batting - I

- By Polly Umrigar

[A] GENERAL QUALIFICATION



This man always appears to have plenty of time to play his strokes

Batsmanship is an art that consists of timing, judgment, temperament and concentration.

One hallmark of good batting is that the player appears to have plenty of time in which to play his shots. Some players are marvellous in the nets, but cannot reproduce their form in matches. Others are poor net players, but succeed in matches because they possess the so-called big match temperament.

Hand in hand with temperament must go concentration, which has to be cultivated by anyone who wishes to rise to international standard. Also, he should get into the habit of watching the bowler's hand when the latter is in the act of delivering the ball, and follow the ball in the air, from the pitch till it touches the bat. A batsman should be able to see the ball turning in the air as it comes down the pitch towards him when the bowler is a slow spinner.

Batting at the nets is the first method of improving one's efficiency in batting.

Throughout his career, a batsman, even though he may have achieved fame, must practice at the nets. It is always a good idea to try and obtain net practice against the type of bowlers who worry you the most or whom you expect to play in forthcoming matches.

Coaching is necessary for every budding cricketer. However, coaches should always build upon and improve the existing talent. It is seldom wise to completely alter a player's style or try to mould every player into precisely the same type. Coaches should devote more of their time to things where there should be basic soundness, irrespective of grip, stance, stroke production etc. Footwork is one of the keys to great batsmanship.

[B] TAKING GUARD

Every batsman upon arriving at the crease must take guard.

There are three common positions

- I. Middle stump
- II. Leg stump

III. Middle and leg or two legs.

The sole purpose of taking guard is to enable the batsman to judge the direction of the ball relative to his wicket. The batsman marks a line from the popping crease

[C] THE GRIP

How to grip a bat depends on the batsman's method. Some batsmen have a low grip, in that they hold the bat low down the handle. Others hold the bat in the middle of the handle, and there are some who have a very high grip. Whatever be the grip, the two hands should be very close to one another - in fact just about touching when the batting gloves are on. If the right hand is kept far down the handle, then the batsman is likely to have good defensive control and will be able to play strokes behind the wicket splendidly, but his driving will not be up to the mark. If the two hands are kept very high up on the handle, then the batsman will have a high back lift and will be able to drive the ball with power. However, he will always be prone to snick the ball in the slips. It is therefore, always advisable to keep the two hands in the 'medium' position for maximum power and control.

[D] THE STANCE

Once again, we cannot lay down any hard and fast rules because test players have been successful with quite different stances. However, the initial position when awaiting delivery of the ball should be one wherein the batsman is comfortably relaxed and well balanced, so that he is able to go forward or backwards, or attack or defend with equal readiness. One should not crouch right over or stand completely erect.



John wright, coach of the indian team, works on yuvraj singh's stance Somebatsmen

- 1: keep a gap of about 6" apart.
- 2: keep their feet together The rear foot should be atleast a couple of inches behind the batting crease.

This is to allow for a slight drag when playing forward. Remember, the foot must be behind the crease to avoid a stumping. On the line is out.

A stance is of three types. The type varies with the direction in which the front toe points:

- 1: Towards Gully

- 2: Towards Cover point
- 3: Towards Extra cover
(two-eyed stance)

Footwork Works

- By Ashok Mankad

There is obviously no single key that can unravel the many secrets of the art of batting. There are several, of which 'Footwork' is one of the most critical. It is to batting what the foundation is to a building. Without it, there can be no structure.



Damien Martyn displays his footwork
in the Chennai Test, October 2004.

A batsman can get away a few times with fantastic hand-eye coordination and minimal footwork, but not for a very long time. Bowlers at the international level will not take long to sort you out. Of course, there are always exceptions, like our very own VVS Laxman and Virender Sehwag. But then, they are exceptions, and one must not forget that. The 'step-out-and-drive' stroke, which is usually executed against a spinner, cannot be played without effective footwork. Hand-eye coordination without footwork will not help. Hand-eye coordination may also not work in isolation on wickets on which the ball is not coming on to the bat. Footwork becomes vital when the batsmen have to go for the ball rather than wait for it to come to them.

Every batsman should strive to attain perfect hand-eye-feet coordination. Perfection is of course not possible to achieve, but one can try and come close.

Many cricket pundits will define good footwork as technically correct footwork. But is that enough? The answer is 'no'.

For the batsman, good, impeccable technique should go hand in hand with correct judgement of the speed at which he should move his feet. For instance, if he moves back in the perfect and

technically correct manner, but is slow in doing so, he may be bowled or trapped LBW. On the other hand, he may lob a simple catch in the air if he is too early into his shot.



Rahul Dravid drives leg-spinner Stuart MacGill on India's tour of Australia in 2003-04.

Batsmen who are quick on their feet are at an advantage, especially against slow bowling. A batsman who jumps down the wicket to attack a spinner and then decides against playing the shot at the last moment or in some cases, misses the ball, will be able to go back and regain his crease if his footwork is good.

A visible characteristic of great players is the apparent ease with which they play their strokes. They always seem to be in the right position to play their shots, with plenty of time to spare. Sir Don Bradman, Sunil Gavaskar and Rahul Dravid are some batting greats to come to mind when one thinks about batsmen whose footwork helps them put themselves in the best position to play their strokes. In fact, achieving the right position amounts to winning half the battle as far as strokeplay is concerned.

Skipping can play as important a role in cricket as it does in sports like boxing, hockey, tennis and athletics. It improves cardio-vascular fitness, which is a bonus for a sportsman. It helps in keeping the feet light, which in turn, develops one's footwork. My father, the legendary Vinoo Mankad, used to tell us to skip in the dressing-room at regular intervals whenever we were awaiting our turn to bat, and a big partnership was developing in the middle. He advocated skipping as it kept the legs moving and blood flowing!

Nearly every outdoor sport requires a specific type of footwork. In cricket for instance, one need not skip continuously, whereas in boxing, a player needs to have a lot of stamina and so will need to skip for longer periods. The first thing I used to put in my kitbag in my playing days was the skipping rope. I used to skip in sets of 100/200/ 500, and ensure that I did 1000 daily. Not only did it improve my batting, but also my agility and running between the wickets. Nirupama Mankad, my wife, who did the country proud in tennis, used to do 5000 skips daily!

It can be said categorically that footwork is the essence of a successful sports career, without which he / she will struggle in the long run.

Equipment - The 'essentials' - I

- By Polly Umrigar

BATTING GLOVES

Instinctively, a young boy is inclined to dislike batting gloves. They feel clumsy and prevent his skin from making contact with the bat handle as he would desire. But the young boy should get over this feeling quickly, as no batsman can afford the risk of batting without gloves. Moreover, they help increase one's confidence by leaps and bounds.

There are various types of gloves.

1. Gauntlet type gloves with cotton palm and tubular back. In these gloves, the hand fits right into the glove and there is no direct contact between the skin of the palm and the bat. They are most widely used.

2. Open palm gloves with kid finger stalls and tubular back. Some cricketers wear open gloves with a thin pair of ordinary white cotton gloves underneath, which can be changed when wet, thereby saving the main pair of gloves from getting wet.

A batsman should ensure that:

1. The palm of the glove is not worn out, in which case the bat will slip from the hand. .
2. To change the gloves while batting if they have become wet with perspiration.

ABDOMINAL GUARD



Mark Waugh, former Australian Test cricketer, at a practice session

No batsman should take the risk of playing without an abdominal guard. They give confidence as well as protection. They are made of aluminium or plastic and will withstand a very hard blow without damage.

There are two types of abdominal guards:

- 1: Guard attached to a strap round the waist.
- 2: Jock strap with a pouch into which the guard fits. The advantages of the second type is that it can be slipped in at the last moment before going in to bat or taken out in a second at intervals and it cannot get out of place.

THIGH PADS

Nowadays, it is common for a batsman to wear a thigh pad. It consists of an oblong piece of sponge rubber fitted into a cloth bag, and is worn to protect the outer portion of the front leg between the top of the pad and hip. The pad is not very thick (say about half an inch). It is light and held in place by thin tapes tied round the waist at the top and round the leg at the bottom.

Without a thigh pad there is a tendency to get the body right inside the line of flight and run the risk of being caught behind from a very fine glance. With the thigh pad on, the batsman may be willing to stay more on the line of ball and take the ball if necessary, on his thigh with confidence, particularly when the fielders are placed very close on the leg side.

Wicket Keeping Gloves inner and outer The inner gloves should be put on slightly damp .and the outer gloves should then fit snugly over the top. Normally they are stiff and require to be worked in by a fair amount of practice so that they become pliable and form a cup into which the ball snugly fits. Gloves need to be faced. The rubber surface tends to become shiny and slippery so a preparation is often used to make it slightly tacky. This mixed preparation is available in sports shops.

Bat and Pad

THE BAT

For a young lad, it is important to get a bat of the right size. It is a grave handicap for any youngster to learn the rudiments of the game with a bat of the wrong size.

A full size bat is some 35 inches long, and a good serviceable bat weighs about 2 lbs and 4 ounces. What is known as a 'short handle' bat has a blade of normal size but the handle is about one inch shorter.

Then we come to size "six" bats that are about 33 inches long, and sizes "five" and "four" that are correspondingly smaller.

As a guide, a boy whose height exceeds five feet, is big enough to use a full size bat of 35 inches.

There is no hard and fast rule that short men should use short handle bats and tall men should use long handle bats. The players themselves must decide which type suits them best. However, we do find more and more cricketers using short handle bats.



Besides the size and length of the handle, there are grips of varying sizes; thin, medium and thick. Here too, the player himself has to decide which grip is most suitable for him. One must make sure that the rubber grip on the handle is securely glued. Many a wicket has been lost because the rubber grip twists on the bat handle whilst making a stroke. Worn-out rubber grips should be replaced immediately.

Whilst choosing a bat, one must make sure that its grains are as straight as possible. If the grains are close to each other, it means that the bat has 'power'. A bat having very few grains will last longer but it will not have the same power.

In choosing a bat, one must be guided by its feel and balance. It is very important how the bat feels in your hand.

It is wise to oil the blade before using it, especially in our type of climate. A light coating of raw linseed oil will do and for those who want to extract the maximum durability from the bat, some preliminary hitting with an old ball in a sock or rubbing the blade with an old cricket stump will help. The bat should not be oiled too frequently. A very light sandpapering followed by a thin coat of oil after a day's play is adequate enough. One should be careful not to oil the back of the blade.

LEG GUARDS

Leg-guards or Pads are worn on both legs to offer protection against injury. Whilst selecting leg-guards, one should see that they are not very heavy. Bulky, clumsy leg-guards will give more protection against injury, but they will to a certain extent restrict your footwork. One should select leg-guards that are comfortable and fit well.

Leg-guards should be worn in such a way that the straps are on the outer side of the legs. They should not be kept hanging but properly buckled or strapped. If the leg-guards are worn in such a way that the straps are on the inner side, then they are likely to hinder the batsman whilst running between the wicket and the batsman may lose his balance and fall.

A top-grade cricketer should discard his pads and get new ones if the portion above the knee becomes flappy. Apart from the untidy appearance, there is the danger of being given out caught behind when the ball hits this loose portion and flies to the keeper, slips or short-leg. The sound of the ball hitting the flap can be mistaken as that of the ball finding the edge of the bat.

The leg-guards should be kept clean and one should ensure that the straps are intact before the start of a match.

Horizontal Bat Strokes - Part II

- By Ashok Mankad

THE HOOK AND PULL

The execution of both strokes begins in a similar manner, but the final few movements are different.

Keep three things in mind when you play these strokes.

- A. Always get inside the line of the short ball.
- B. If you want to hit the ball along the ground, ensure that you roll your wrists at the point of impact.
- C. Remember that the pace of the ball might force you to 'hurry up', thereby increasing the chances of your making a mistake. Hence, attempt these strokes only after you have practised them and feel reasonably confident of executing them well.

HOW TO PLAY THE HOOK



Michael Vaughan hooks

1(A) Raise the bat straight behind you, keeping your knees and elbows flexed. When facing fast bowlers, lift the bat a little earlier than usual.

(B) Keep your head still and focus on the ball.

2(A) Move the right foot backwards (for 'righties') and across the line of the ball, so that your head is inside the line of the ball and the body is facing the bowler.

(B) Start stretching your arms outwards at full length as you swing the bat across the path of the ball.

(C) Transfer your weight onto the back foot.

3. Swing the bat horizontally across the path of the ball with the arms fully extended.

Your body should rotate, pivoting on the right foot. A hook can either be played high in the air, or along the ground. To keep the ball on the ground, the batsman should roll his wrists at the point of impact.

A word of caution - Be prepared to duck if you do not hit the ball. The hook can be a risky shot. You can get a top-edge and give a catch on in the fine-leg / long-leg region, or you can even get hit on the upper part of the body if you miss it. Some batsmen have managed to play the ball onto their face or head and sustain serious injuries!

This stroke should be attempted only if you are an experienced batsman and 'hooker'

THE PULL



The left-handed version - Brian Lara pulls

The pull is easier to play than the hook. As in the hook, the bat is swung horizontally across the path of the ball with the arms extended and the right foot acting as a pivot. Your body should not rotate as much as it does while playing the hook. The ball is 'pulled' squarely along the ground or over the infield, on the leg side. Normally, the pull is played in front of square. At the end of the shot, the body-weight is transferred onto the left foot.

At the completion of the pull shot, the body-weight should be transferred onto the right leg (for right-handers) in the follow-through.

Among the great pullers in today's times are Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid. Sir Don Bradman. The 'best of them all', was a master of this stroke. He must have scored nearly 40% of his first-class runs with the pull!

THE HOOK AND THE PULL - DIFFERENCES

The main difference between the pull and the hook is that a pull is generally played off a delivery that is chest-high or even slightly lower, whereas the hook is played to a ball above shoulder-height.

While executing the pull, your footwork should get you across the line of the delivery, while on the other hand, you need to be just inside the line or within the line of the delivery while playing the hook.

The range of the pull is between mid-on and square-leg, whilst the range of the hook is between square-leg and fine-leg.

Horizontal Bat Strokes - Part I

- By Ashok Mankad

Two primary horizontal bat strokes are the sweep and the cut. The sweep is played off spinners, while the cut can be played off pace as well as spin.

THE SWEEP

The initial movement of the sweep is the same as that for the forward-defensive stroke, but the sweep is played with horizontal movement of the bat.

This stroke is played to good-length balls that pitch in the line with or outside the leg-stump. A right-handed batsman should 'sweep' the bat around his body from right to left to despatch the ball square on the leg-side, or behind the wickets.

How to play the sweep -

(A) Lift the bat straight behind you. Lean forward, towards the line of the ball as it pitches.

(B) Keep your eyes on the ball and try to determine its line and length.

(C) Hold the bat predominantly with your left hand, and use the right hand only for support. Left-handers should do the opposite.

(D) Swing the bat horizontally to make contact with the ball in front of the pad. The ball should hit your pad if it misses the bat.

(E) Your timing must be spot-on. Do not hit the ball too hard because it will not allow you to roll your wrists at the right time.

(F) Bend the front foot to 90 degrees and allow the back leg to trail at the time of contact with the ball. Roll the wrists anti-clockwise, so that the bat does not fly out of your hand.

Pakistani maestro Javed Miandad was one of the best 'sweepers' in the history of the sport.

VARIATIONS:

PADDLE SWEEP

Sachin Tendulkar is brilliant at playing this stroke. A paddle sweep sends the ball very fine behind the stumps, almost as if the batsman has played a 'reverse-drive'.

REVERSE SWEEP

This is one of the most prominent unorthodox strokes in cricket. To put it simply, it is a left-hander's sweep played by a right-handed batsman with a right-handed grip, and vice versa. Some right-handers even change their grip to a left-hander's (and vice versa) while playing this shot.

The reverse-sweep can be a very effective and at the same time, embarrassing stroke. Effective, because it can fetch the batsman a lot of runs, embarrassing because if he is unable to 'time' it well, he can get out and make a fool of himself. Hence, it should be attempted only by batsmen who have practised it in the nets and are reasonably confident of connecting properly.

The reverse-sweep is said to have been 'invented' by K.S. Duleepsinhji, who represented England in Test cricket in the late 1920s. In later years, Mushtaq Mohammed of Pakistan and Ian Botham of England essayed it often, as did former English skipper Mike Gatting, with disastrous consequences in the 1987 World Cup final. But the best exponent of this stroke is the Zimbabwean Andy Flower.

THE SQUARE CUT

The square-cut is a back-foot stroke. It despatches the ball on the off-side at a right angle to the pitch. It is a stroke fraught with risk, and should be practised in the nets before being essayed in a match.

This stroke should be attempted to balls that have pitched wide outside the off-stump.

How to play the square-cut:

- (A) Lift the bat and observe the line and length of the ball. Your left shoulder should point towards the ball before making contact for right-handers).
- (B) Focus on the ball over your left shoulder while remaining side-on.
- (C) Move the right foot across, towards the line of the ball. The foot should be parallel to the stumps with the toes pointing to the off-side. Flex the knees.
- (D) Lift the bat straight behind your head.
- (E) Turn your front shoulder towards the off-side
- (F) Swing the bat downwards, with your arms extended (as if you are using an axe to cut a tree). Roll your wrists to keep the ball down. The right hand should control this shot for right-handers, and the left hand for 'lefties'.
- (G) Keep your head steady.
- (H) Transfer your weight onto the right foot as you make contact with the ball.
- (I) Follow through with the body-weight on the right foot. As you finish the shot, your head should stay still and the hands and bat should 'finish' upwards.

VARIATIONS:

LATE CUT

The late cut is literally, played 'late'. If a square-cut sends the ball in the region of point, a late cut sends it in the direction of third-man.

Gundappa Vishwanath, India's batting great of the 1970s, was an outstanding 'cutter'. The late Vijay Merchant was a fine exponent of the late cut.

Of Defence and Drives

- By Ashok Mankad

DEFENSIVE STROKES

Forward defence:

Play this stroke to a ball that is pitched in line with the wicket at a good length, distance that makes it difficult to decide whether you should play forward or backward or to hit the ball.

Move your foot in line with the direction of the ball and block it with the straight face of the bat.

Backfoot defence:

Play this stroke to balls that pitch slightly shorter and bounce higher. Unlike the forward defence, this stroke is played with the bat held high. The body should stay side on during the shot. Raise the bat making sure that backswing is correct, keeping your head still. Watch the ball as it leaves the bowler's hand. Once you have determined the line and length of the ball, bring the bat into vertical position with your hands held high. Your weight should be evenly balanced with your head forward.

DRIVES

Drives are not only the most attacking strokes to learn, they are exciting too. They are played to the balls that are pitched close to the wicket and are hit as they come off the ground.

There are three types of drives: straight drive, cover drive and an on drive.

The first step of a drive is like a forward defence, so that you can switch between defence and attack at the last moment.

Cover drive:

The cover drive is the most elegant stroke played by the batsman. It is played to balls pitching in line with or just outside the off stump. You have to lean your whole body forward in the line of the ball, leading with your head and shoulder, to step forward automatically. Strike the ball late, close to your body. Raise the bat, watch the line and length of the ball, keep your head still and keep your eyes on the ball. To move quickly against fast bowling bend your knees a little, transfer your body weight from the heels to toe as you lift your bat for playing the stroke. Lean towards the ball, leading with your head and left shoulder. Keep your bat high up till your body weight has begun to transfer on your front foot. Aim your left shoulder and head in the direction and bounce. To improve your timing and cope with late swings and seam movements, play the ball as late as possible. Bring your weight onto the front foot and hit the ball with vertical bat after it pitches. Keep your head steady and eyes on the ball as it hits the bat. Your front pad must be positioned very close to the ball at the time of

impact of the bat, body weight on front foot. You must look down rather than up. If your head stays down, so will the ball. You must finish your shot with your hands high, holding the bat equally with both hands and straightening the back leg at the completion of the stroke.

The Straight Drive:

This powerful attacking stroke sends the ball towards the bowler. Straight drives are played to a full length ball pitching in line with off and middle stumps. A correct backlift that brings the bat down straight past the left pad is very important. Raise the bat and keep your head still, determine the line and length of the ball and bend knees slightly. Lean towards the ball and bring your left foot near the pitch. Bring the bat down vertically accelerating it as you make contact. Your body weight should be on the front foot. If your right elbow stays close to your body, the bat will come down straight. The bat should graze the outside of your front foot. Play the shot with the full face of the bat. The bottom hand carries the weight of the bat upwards. Follow through and finish with your hands high. Keep your eyes on the ball.

The On Drive:

This shot is played for balls pitched close to your feet in line with or outside the leg stump. You should not overstep with your leading leg. The on drive is difficult and only the top batsmen can play it properly. Raise the bat early when facing the fast bowlers and make sure about your backswing. You have to determine the line and length by the time the ball reaches middle of the pitch. Keep your knees slightly bent. Lean into the line of the ball leading with your head and left shoulder and bring your left foot forward. Ball is to be hit after it pitches with a vertical bat. Keep your left shoulder low, front leg should take your body weight. Hit the ball with a straight bat. As you follow through, your body should turn anti-clockwise. Your right shoulder should be visible to the umpire when you complete the stroke.

In the subsequent article, we shall discuss attacking strokes on the backfoot with horizontal bat.

To become a good batsman

- By Ashok Mankad

Soon after I packed up my bags and hung up my boots in '86, I got into coaching. Yours Truly was the first cricket consultant in India. And the late Maharajah of Gwalior gave me my first assignment as the coach of Madhya Pradesh for three years. Since then, somewhere or the other I have been endeavoring to share my experiences with young and talented cricketers of the country. I must say it has been a gratifying experience to give back to the game what it gave me. At the outset, I must point out that too many instructions to a student does not help. A good coach must always remember to encourage his positive aspects and ignore the mistakes subtly so that his confidence levels don't go down. The fundamental technique of batting can be taught to a child from the age of

8/10 years. It all begins with the correct stance.

STANCE

The feet should be spread about 6" apart, parallel in the line of batting crease. Weight should be equally distributed on both the feet so that he has the choice of movement in going forward or backward. In each case, his movement can be made with the same degree of effort which will ensure optimum stability. He must keep your hips and shoulders in line. Stand as tall as possible, wait for the ball and make sure that he keeps his head very steady. His left shoulder should point towards the bowler (for the right hander) and the knees slightly bent. He should check his grip. His bat should be grounded just behind the back foot and the top hand should rest slightly on the front batting pad. I attach importance to the stance because a batsmen with defective footwork can never become a good player. The stance also lets a batsman know where his off stump is and helps him to leave the balls outside the off stump. Maestro Sunil Gavaskar was particularly good at this. When he opened, Sunil would leave many deliveries, which ordinary batsmen would poke at. I had the privilege of playing with him often and derived a great pleasure of watching the master at his best. The secret to that art was his most comfortable stance.

GRIP

The batsman should wrap his thumbs and forefingers around the handle to make two 'v' shapes. Back of his top hand should always face the direction of the ball. And both the hands should be in the center i.e. the bottom hand should be 5 cms above the blade. He must practice this grip until it feels natural. For instance, Sachin Tendulkar's grip is not something that I have been advocating. But we all know how effective and successful he is. He holds the bat at the bottom and manages it well. Good luck to him. The batsman's top hand should be firmer than the bottom hand. 80% of the task is done by the top hand whilst playing with vertical bat and the bottom hand comes in play whilst playing horizontal strokes. Otherwise it plays a supporting role.

BACK LIFT

The back lift is the first movement of any stroke. For the correct back lift, the batsman should lift his bat in line with stumps, rotating his left hand so that the face of the blade opens and is towards the Covers. His left shoulder and elbow should point towards the ball. He should keep his eyes on the ball and elbows clear from the body. He should keep his feet balanced and still, throughout the action. To make his back lift straight, he should place two stumps on the ground at a distance of 15". While indoors, two stools can suffice. For forward defence, he should stand two feet away and not the usual 4 and half feet and for back-foot strokes stand 4 feet away and execute the action without touching the stumps behind. If this can be achieved, he will be developing the correct back-lift.