

[www.cricketforindia.com](http://www.cricketforindia.com)

GUIDES YOU IN THE GAME OF CRICKET



Cricket for India (CFI) - A platform to experience the passion of cricket

## Bowling

- » [Bowling in ODIs - Part II](#)
- » [The Sides of Spin](#)
- » [Cutting Edge](#)
- » [Bowling in ODIs - Part I](#)
- » [Good-Length, Out and In](#)
- » [Bowling - Length and Direction](#)
- » [Leg-Spin - An Introduction](#)
- » [The Art Of Spin Bowling - I](#)
- » [Fundamentals of fast bowling techniques](#)
- » [Spin Bowling](#)

## Bowling in ODIs - Part II

That one-day cricket is completely a batsman-oriented game is emphasized by the fact that its rules impose restrictions on the bowlers.



Shane Warne - deadly 'at the death'

A bowler can deliver only a fifth of the total number of over's that his team is supposed to bowl. This leaves the captain of the fielding side with no option but to rotate his bowlers. While doing so, he has to take into account factors like the match-situation, the state of the wicket and the quality of the batsmen at the crease. Generally, the best bowlers are used in the first few over's and the last few, although the decision is also based on the form of the bowlers. It's not always the efficiency of the bowler, but the effectiveness that dictates bowling changes. Shoaib Akhtar might be the most popular Pakistani bowler, but they does not necessarily make him the most effective. Mohammed Sami, Abdul Razzaq and Rana Naved-ul-Hasan have fared far better than him in recent times. Even if Shoaib returns to the Pakistani side tomorrow, Inzamam-ul-Haq will be more inclined to entrust the responsibility of bowling in the 'death' overs to his three colleagues.

Of course, there are times when 'shock' strategies work. New Zealand provided the classic example of the same when they opened the bowling with off-spinner Dipak Patel in the 1992 World Cup.

Considering that everything is so heavily loaded against them, it is not surprising that bowlers are under more pressure in an ODI than in a Test match. A bowler who fails to strike form in an ODI will be brutalized. His woes will be compounded if his team lacks all-rounders and has gone into the match with only four frontline bowlers, like the current Indian outfit. This means that whether he or his captain likes it or not, he will have to complete his full quota of overs, regardless of whether the batsmen have taken a fancy to his bowling.

The only way out in such a situation is to keep calm and rethink one's strategies. Sticking to the basics and not experimenting will help. A case in point was Venkatesh Prasad in the 1996 World Cup quarter-final against Pakistan. After some expensive overs, he made up his mind to bowl straight and attack the stumps, and ended up castling the dangerous Aamir Sohail.

Most captains look to preserving their main bowlers for the 'death' overs. The type of bowling really doesn't matter. A paceman like Glenn McGrath is a real asset for Australia at the 'death', as was leg-spinner Shane Warne before he retired from one-day internationals. However, this tactic of 'preservation' could backfire in the odd game, as a bowler can find it difficult to regain his rhythm after being out of the attack for some time.

There can also be times when the slow bowlers need to be given more overs to finish off the innings within the stipulated period, although they may not be in the best of form.

#### **The batsman's abilities and intentions:**

The mind game between the batsman and bowler is all about out-thinking each other. The batsman should be pressurized to make a mistake. The best way is to choke the scoring. This strategy works equally well while bowling first or second. If the batsmen are allowed to settle down and score freely, there will be no pressure and they will be able to build their innings. Bowlers and fielders should not only aim to deny boundaries and sixes, but also prevent rotation of the strike.

Of course, this is easier said than done against batsmen like Adam Gilchrist and Virender Sehwag, who can murder any attack. But it is still possible if the bowler 'bowls to his field' on one side of the wicket. If nothing is working, then the bowler should experiment with slower deliveries and the odd quick yorker. In this cat-and-mouse game, the batsman sometimes walks down the pitch or creates room for himself to unsettle the bowler. It is all the more important for the bowler to stick to his plan while sticking to the basics.

In the death overs, a bowler should concentrate on yorkers and full-length deliveries rather than on good-length or short deliveries.

The pitch, and a positive mindset: Everyone is well aware about the type of pitches that are used in ODIs. They are beltors, tailor-made for batting. The greatest of bowlers have been mauled in ODIs at some point in their careers on placid tracks, especially in the Indian subcontinent. A bowler who retains a positive outlook and focuses on making the most of the resources at his command will be more successful than someone who cribs about the lack of life in the pitch.

## The sides of Spin

There are two fundamental types of spin bowling in cricket; off-spin and leg-spin.

### OFF SPIN

The greatest advantage of off-spin bowling is that it can be bowled more accurately than any other type of spin.

An off-spinner can be more accurate than a mean and miserly medium-pacer, provided he does not try to impart too much spin or variation.



Bishan Bedi

The main leverage to obtain off-spin comes from the index finger of the bowling (right) hand, which while releasing the ball, is turned outwards and downwards by a coordinating turn of the fingers and wrist. The ball is spun from left to right - from the right-handed batsman's off-stump to his leg-stump. Body movement and shoulder swing also play a big part in off-spin. Some bowlers can spin the ball more than others.

A bowler who turns the ball a lot should bowl round the wicket.

Off-breaks are less exacting to bowl in physical terms, and hence the longevity of bowlers of this type in top-level cricket is on the higher side.

An off-break can be delivered with the hand very high and the arm coming straight over. Variation can be procured by delivering from a slightly more round-arm position, so that the angle of spin, when the ball hits the ground, won't be quite the same.

On a hard wicket, the off-spinner should bowl on the off stump or just outside the off stump. A consistent off-stump line will trouble the batsman, who will have to guard against several ways of getting out. An off-spinner should always deploy a first slip on a hard surface.

Jim Laker, Erapalli Prasanna and S. Venkataraghvan were excellent off-spinners. Of the current lot, Harbhajan Singh and Muttiah Muralitharan are impressive.

The spinning agent in this brand of 'deception' is the third finger of the bowling hand. The first two fingers and thumb are used to grip the ball.

When a leg-break is about to be delivered, the palm of the bowling hand should be practically facing

the batsman and as the ball is released, the third finger should be flicked up and over the ball, thus spinning it somewhere in the direction of gully.

More spin can be imported by the use of the third finger along with a strong and flexible wrist. This requires a lot of practice as spin can be difficult to control.



Some bowlers have developed what may be termed as a purely 'finger-spun leg-break'. This form of spin is achieved by reducing the distance between the second and third fingers in the grip, and by rolling rather than flicking the wrist at the point of delivery.

While bowling a top-spinner, the palm of the hand should face the ground at the delivery-point. The fingers should point towards mid-on and run practically horizontal to the ground as the ball is flicked out of the bowling hand.

As for the googly, it is merely a question of turning the wrist over until the back of the hand is facing the batsman at the point of delivery. From this position, the ball is spun in exactly the same manner as a leg-break, but it comes up from the third finger, over the top of the little finger, and is thus found to be turning in the air in the same direction as the off break.

Subhash Gupte was the best leg-spinner of my time. In the present era, Shane Warne is easily the best.

#### **LEFT ARM SPIN**



Harbhajan Singh.

The slow left-handed spinner is an extremely accurate type and often fills the role of a stock bowler when batting conditions are easy. His normal task is to bowl to a strong off-side field and to play on the batsman's patience. If the pitch is taking turn, he will be better suited bowling round the wicket.

Vinoo Mankad and Bishan Bedi were two of the greatest left-arm spinners of all time.

There are some left-arm spinners who bowl wrist-spin as opposed to the conventional finger-spin. The Australians Michael Bevan and Brad Hogg are two practitioners of this type. This brand of left-arm spin is called 'chinaman'. In England, the left-arm spinner's stock delivery that spins from the right-hander's off-stump to the leg-stump is called a 'chinaman'. However, in Australia, the same term refers to a delivery that turns the opposite way; the left-arm wrist spinner's 'googly' that spins from the right-handed batsman's leg-stump to off-stump. The rest of the cricketing world uses the term interchangeably.

## Cutting Edge

Considering that bowlers have a hard time in modern-day cricket, it is important that they make the most of all the factors that are within their control. They can deceive the batsmen by expanding their repertoire and mixing up their deliveries. There are also other things that they can do.

Bowlers can alter the angle of delivery by 'using the crease'. They could deliver one ball from close to the stumps, the following one from the edge of the crease, and so on. Generally, a bowler goes close to the stumps when he wants to run the ball away outside the off stump, and goes wide of the crease when he wants to push one towards the batsman.



Modern master Allan Donald.

The bowler is said to have 'changed his pace' when he delivers a ball that is either faster or slower than his stock delivery. A bowler should vary his pace in a subtle fashion. He should endeavour to maintain exactly the same run-up and action when he decides to change his pace. If he gives it away by say running in quicker to bowl a faster one, a quality batsman can easily make out what he is upto. The objectives of changing pace are to lure the batsman into playing the wrong stroke, or to deceive him into playing the correct stroke too early or too late, and thus prevent him from timing it well.

To deliver a slower ball, the bowler should push the ball further into his palm. If he wants to deliver a faster one, he should hold the ball with his fingers, with minimal contact with the palm.

Bowlers would also do well to learn to 'flight' the ball. If the ball forms an arc in flight and dips down, it can cause the batsman to hit the ball in the air quite unintentionally. It will also probably bounce a little higher than the normal delivery after pitching, and this increases the possibility of an unwary batsman getting out caught-and-bowled.

'Cutters' constitute an important part of a quick bowler's repertoire. They can play an important part in deceiving a batsman and leading him to his doom.

The 'leg' cutter is like a fast leg-break. The middle or third finger plays an important part in this delivery. The ball 'cuts' from leg to off after pitching. In the 'off' cutter, the index finger plays a significant part and the ball 'cuts' from off to leg after pitching.



Wasim 'Wizard' Akram

In both cases, the seam of the ball touches the finger that plays a prominent part. At the moment of release, the hand and fingers 'cut' down the right side of the ball (of the seam) for off cutter and the left side for the leg cutter. The great value of cutters is the speed at which they can be delivered. The batsman gets hardly any time to make up his mind.

A combination of physical strength and suppleness apart, fast bowlers should also possess an element of hostility. No fielding captain will complain if his fast bowler looks aggressive as he runs in to deliver the ball! His run-up should be sufficiently long to work up pace. A needlessly long run-up should be avoided, as it is a waste of energy. When the ball is new, a fast bowler should target the stumps with most of their deliveries. The 'bumper' can be an effective 'shock' ball. No batsman likes to face deliveries that are chest-high, shoulder-high or even head-high. It is balls like these that make them play hasty shots.

The ideal 'bumper' is one that rises without being pitched too short. A fast bowler of 6' 3" will be able to bring the ball down from a sharper angle than a man of say 5' 6", and thereby gain more lift from a ball of the same length. The bumper should normally be bowled at full pace to give the batsman hardly any time to think. It should be bowled directly over the stumps, so as to get him caught on the wrong foot, literally!

Fast bowling is a taxing activity, mentally and physically. The legs, back muscles and stomach muscles are stretched to the maximum and hence, a fast bowler has to look after these parts of his

body. Ideally, fast bowlers should not be given long spells. Bowling in short spells will enable them to be reasonably fresh when they are brought back after a break.

The 'Yorker' can be as dangerous a delivery as the 'bumper'. The Yorker demands a greater degree of accuracy. It should be aimed at the middle or leg-stump. It becomes even more lethal if the bowler is able to swing the ball.

We all know that bowlers who are marginally slower than out-and-out fast bowlers are called 'medium pacers'. There are some bowlers who are medium-pacers throughout their careers, and there are others who may have started out as fast bowlers, but have become medium-pacers after reaching their early 30s. What a quality medium-pacer doesn't have in terms of speed, he is expected to have in terms of variations.

## **Bowling in ODIs - Part I**

Cricket today has become more of a batsman's game than ever before, the limited-overs version even more so. Bowlers are treated very cruelly in one-day internationals, and that is putting it mildly. The conditions and pressure that a bowler encounters in ODIs are far different from those in Test cricket. One-day cricket calls for different mental demands. The strategies adopted by the bowlers in ODIs are not merely governed by whether they are bowling first or second, but by various other factors, like:

**Fielding positions**

**Type of ball**

**Over-restrictions for each bowler**

**The batsman's abilities and intentions**

**Pitch**

Each of these factors needs to be examined and analysed to clearly define the strategies and roles of the bowlers.

### ***Fielding positions:***

The fielding restrictions in one-day cricket permit only two fielders outside the 30-yards circle. Of the seven fielders in the circle, two have to stand in stationary catching positions. The 'catchers' mainly play a run-saving role. The men who stand in the slips in the first few overs are shifted to leg-slip or short mid-wicket. The slips are thus left vacant, even in the first 15 overs. Imagine the predicament faced by a quick bowler who may be proficient in inducing the batsmen to edge the ball, only to be gobbled up by the slips. The gaping hole in the slip-cordon will force him to make adjustments, and he might lose his rhythm and even his pace as a result.

The key in such situations is to maintain a good line and length and not experiment a lot. This is crucial, as the batsman can easily loft the ball over the infield due to the fielding restrictions.

Having the right positions in the outfield is of utmost importance. Usually, the bowlers and captains tend to keep the two men at third-man on the off-side and fine-leg on the leg-side, irrespective of the type of bowling, batsman, and wicket. However, one should ideally take these three factors into consideration and then decide where to place the outfielders. A better bet would be to have a fielder



at long off or long-on and then bowl full-length deliveries. But here again, accuracy has to be maintained. There should be different plans for different opposition batsmen.



Even they have been punished for not being disciplined enough...with the ball

The fielding restrictions are relaxed after the 15th over. However, at least four men have to stand within the 30-yards circle throughout the innings. It is advisable to keep as many fielders as possible in single-saving positions and make the batsmen work harder for their runs. The aim of every fielding captain should be to strike a balance between an attacking and defensive field.

The bowlers should be 'disciplined'. Bowling on one side of the wicket will help if the field has been appropriately set. A bowler will be slaughtered if he does not 'bowl to his field'. Even tornados like Brett Lee and Shoaib Akhtar have copped harsh treatment whenever their bowling has fallen short of the 'disciplined' mark! Remember Sachin Tendulkar's assault on Shoaib in the 2003 World Cup game between India and Pakistan?

Type of ball: Matches played with coloured clothing require a ball of a different colour; white. Some of these matches are played under floodlights. Originally, the white ball was lacquered and did not swing at all. It was also a lot harder than the traditional red cherry. However, the white balls that are used today are more similar to the red ones. They swing a little bit if the conditions are conducive, but still not as much as the red cherry.

A bowler needs to feel comfortable bowling with a white ball if he has to be accurate with it. This means that he needs to practice in the nets. If he doesn't, he might well be in for a lot of agony and distress during the actual match. He could find it difficult to control the swing and spray the ball all over the place. The batsmen certainly won't complain!

To be continued... [Bowling in ODIs - Part II](#)

## Good-Length, Out and In

A 'good-length' delivery challenges and questions the judgment of even a class batsman. A batsman plays fuller deliveries off the front foot and short deliveries off the back foot. A good-length delivery lands on a spot not as close as the one on which a fuller delivery lands, nor as farther down the wicket as the one on which a short ball lands.

The good-length spot varies from batsman to batsman, depending upon his height and reach. The good-length spot for a shorter batsman will be closer to the stumps than that for a taller batsman.

Generally, the good-length area can be indicated as between six feet and twelve feet away from the batsman for a fast bowler, and between four and six feet away from the batsman for a slow bowler.

The other types of deliveries are:

- (i) Full toss
- (ii) Yorker
- (iii) Half volley
- (iv) Long-hop

Full-tosses, half-volleys and long-hops are regarded as ordinary deliveries that quality batsmen are expected to punish. A full-toss comes on to the bat directly without bouncing even once, a long-hop pitches and then 'sits up', demanding to be hit, and a half-volley lands in the 'groove', a perfect ball for a batsman to play a crashing front-foot stroke. However, these deliveries do fetch wickets every now and then. Cricket is an unpredictable sport after all!

The Yorker can be one of the effective weapons in a fast bowler's armoury.

### **SWING AND SWERVE**



A high-arm action -  
Shaun Pollock in the nets

'Swing' is the term that is applied to the movement of a ball in the air, caused by the shine on the ball and angle of the seam - not through spin. 'Swerve' is movement of the ball in the air with a lot of spin on the ball.

An off-spinner turning from off to the leg-side will find his delivery 'drifting' towards the slips. A leg-spinner who spins the ball from the leg-side towards the slips will find the ball drifting towards or outside the batsman's feet. Top-spin causes a ball to drop quicker than normal.

The stronger the wind blowing towards the ball, the greater is the swerve. That is the main reason slow bowlers should almost invariably bowl against the wind.

Certain conditions are desirable to obtain maximum swing.

A shiny new ball will swing in humid / heavy conditions.

Wind will also aid swing.

As these factors disappear, so will swing.

### ***OUTSWINGER***

The ball is held between the first two fingers (which are apart) and the thumb, with the seam upright, the index finger on the left side of the seam and the second finger just placed on the other side with the thumb under the ball and on the seam. The seam should point towards the slips and the shiny side of the ball should face the leg-side.

In delivering the outswinger, a right-handed bowler may occasionally obtain more swing by allowing his arm to stray slightly to the right. The more the ball swings, the more important it will be to pitch it in the right area. One should try to make the batsman come onto the front foot.

A late outswinger is one wherein the ball flies dead straight three quarters of the length of the pitch, and then suddenly dips one way or the other. This can be achieved with a high-arm action. It can happen when the wicket is grassy.

### ***INSWINGER***



After the 'release' - Steve Harmison.

The ball can be held in almost the same way as for the outswinger, except that the shiny should face the opposite direction (off-side) with the seam pointing towards fine leg. The fingers should be closer to each other.

While delivering the inswinger, a bowler needs to keep his action as high as possible, almost flicking his right ear at the point of release. The palm of the hand should turn towards the leg-side as the ball is delivered.

With regard to wind direction, it is generally agreed that a mild breeze coming towards the bowler from the direction of third slip will help the inswinger, whilst a breeze coming from the area between square leg and the wicketkeeper will assist the outswinger. Too much breeze is not good as it can retard the bowler's pace, although most fast bowlers won't mind having the wind behind them to help them bowl quicker.

One shouldn't overdo swing. To keep the batsmen on tenterhooks, it is advisable to mix 'swingers' with straight deliveries.

## Bowling-Length and direction

It is true that there is more glamour attached to batting than bowling. However, a bowler's task is far more severe in physical terms than that of a batsman. To become a good bowler, it is normal and wise for a youngster to determine what type of bowling is likely to suit him the most. Once he does this, the hard work should commence.



Length and direction,  
thy name is  
Glenn McGrath

One of the first things a bowler should realise is that for every wicket he takes, he is sure to send down a certain amount of balls and concede a certain amount of runs.

There are many ways of dismissing batsmen, but statistics reveal that over 50% of them are out 'caught'. Hence, bowlers must learn to utilise their fielders well. Never run them down. It is the bowler who in conjunction with his captain decides where the fieldsmen will be stationed.

A bowler should be more than a mechanical propeller of a ball. He who can assess the strengths and weaknesses of his opponents and accordingly vary his methods to achieve the best results will have a headstart on his less-observant rivals.

A bowler's priority should be to 'attack' - get the batsman out. Very rarely does an all-out negative approach work. It is only natural for the bowler to want the field to be set in a particular manner, but if the captain has a good reason to make an alteration and insists upon doing so, the bowler should obey him and do his best. After all, the captain is the boss. Loyalty to him is essential.

An erratic fast bowler can sometimes get away with punishment, but slow bowlers seldom get an opportunity to come back.

The basic essentials for bowling are LENGTH and DIRECTION.

They are followed by secondary factors like variation in pace, flight, spin, swing etc. The ball should be grasped in the fingers and not the palm.

## ***BOWLING ACTION***

After a youngster has made up his mind on whether he wants to bowl fast, medium-fast or slow, he should decide on the most appropriate action for his delivery.

The purpose of a bowling action is to enable the release of the ball from a comfortable and well-balanced position, whereby the maximum efficiency is obtained from the coordination of the fingers, wrist, arms, shoulders and body. The run-up should be of the precise length required for the purpose, not too short and certainly not too long. It should be smooth. A bowler should not experiment too much with it in his formative years.



Anil Kumble on the 'attack'

The run-up need not be straight. It could be angular. Everything boils down to what the bowler in question is comfortable with. A fast bowler should aim to achieve the maximum momentum at the point of delivery and get the body into the best position in order to put punch into the delivery.

All types of right-handed bowlers seem to place the right foot parallel to the bowling crease in their delivery stride. The body should turn so much that the left side should point towards the batsman. The left arm pushes upwards, the weight is transferred onto the right foot and the body leans backwards. The head should be steady and upright, looking down the wicket over the left arm.

The left leg being raised slightly off the ground is part of the 'winding up' of the bowling action. As the left leg hits the ground, it is braced to take all the weight and also the force of the right arm delivering the ball. The head should be kept up and the right arm should swing towards the batsman after delivery of the ball.

The bowler should quickly move away from the pitch on their follow-through, so that they do not damage it with their boot spikes. If they keep stepping on the 'danger area', the umpires can stop them from bowling after a couple of warnings.

Most fast bowlers have a drag. This enables them to retain body balance.

Quicker bowlers would do well to "keep the arm high". Delivery from a higher point will help fast bowlers and medium-pacers extract 'lift' off the pitch - a most valuable asset. No batsman likes the ball to rise sharply after bouncing.

Spin bowlers usually release the ball from a slightly lower point than fast bowlers. This to an extent makes it easier for them to turn the ball, and enables them to vary their turn and pace.

Having said all this, irrespective of the type of bowler you are, length and direction are most important

## Leg-Spin - An Introduction

Right-arm off-spin and left-arm orthodox spin involve the use of the fingers. On the other hand, the wrist of the bowling hand plays a dominant part in right-arm leg-spin and left-arm unorthodox (chinaman) spin. Leg-spin bowling is one of cricket's most attractive, and difficult aspects. It is an art in itself, which needs to be looked at closely, and studied minutely.

The stock ball of a leg-spinner is the leg-break, wherein the ball changes direction from the leg-stump to the off-stump after pitching. As the ball is released, the bowler's wrist flips over towards the batsman while the third finger spins the ball along the seam.



Shane Keith Warne, Leg-spinner Extraordinaire.

Leg-spin bowlers tend to have a shorter run-up. They run at a slight angle towards the popping crease, to help them retain their side-on position. A leg-spinner can take a lot of wickets if he continues to bowl accurately. If he is not accurate enough, he runs the risk of getting a pasting.

### ***The grip for the leg-break:***

1. Place the first and second fingers across the seam at the top. The third finger should be bent and lie along the seam. The ball should not be rested on the thumb. You have to flick your wrist forwards

as you release the ball, so that your palm faces the ground. Keep looking forward as you lean away from the batsman, stand tall and keep your back straight. To help you stand side-on, keep the back foot as parallel to the crease.

2. Rotate the wrist to achieve maximum spin, swing the bowling arm backwards and upwards, keeping it close to your right ear. The arm should move over your head. Transfer your weight onto your front foot.

3. Release the ball from as high as possible, keeping your head upright and steady, and keep your front knee steady. As you swing the right arm forward, pivot your body around on your left foot and flick the ball as it leaves your hand, so that your palm ends up facing the ground. Spin the ball using your third finger and make sure that the left arm does not drop to the side after you release the ball.

4. Use the left arm to balance the body as your weight moves forward after delivering the ball. Make sure that your follow-through is energetic and powerful. Bring the right arm down and past your left thigh as you complete the action.

5. Watch the ball as it pitches and be prepared for a return catch.

There are different types of leg-spinners. There may be some like Bill O'Reilly (Australia), Bhagwat Chandrashekhkar (India) and Anil Kumble (India), who belong to the 'fast off the wicket' club. These bowlers relied, and in Kumble's case, rely, on speed and bounce along with accuracy. Then there are others like Clarrie Grimmett (Australia) and Subhash Gupte (India), who were huge turners of the ball. It used to be said of them that they could turn the ball even on a glass surface! Shane Warne, the highest wicket-taker in Test cricket, is a member of this fraternity of 'turners'. The quality leg-spinner has a lot of tricks and variations up his sleeve. Each of them will be examined and explained in the subsequent articles

## **The art of Spin Bowling - I**

The bowlers, they say, win matches, while the batsmen save them. To win a cricket match, it is important to be able to take wickets at regular intervals and keep the opposition under pressure. There are two types of bowlers that one gets to see in cricket' The fast bowlers tend to be more physical in their approach, their aim being to propel the ball towards the batsman as fast as they can. Spinners on the other hand, are more cerebral. They are expected to compensate for their lack of speed by using their brains, fingers and wrists to outwit their opponents.

Let's take a look at the varieties of spin bowling.

Off-spin bowling has been dominated in modern times by Muttiah Muralitharan, currently the second-highest wicket-taker in Test cricket. Lance Gibbs, the West Indian off-spinner of the 60s and 70s, was the first spin bowler to take 300 Test wickets. India's very own Harbhajan Singh is an off-spin bowler who seems destined to attain greatness.

## **OFF SPIN**



### **THE OFF-BREAK:**

An off-break is a delivery that changes direction from the off-stump to the leg-stump after pitching. It is usually bowled at a slower speed. Off-spin bowlers do not achieve as much bounce as their leg-spinning counterparts, but they usually have good control over the ball. It is necessary that they pitch the ball at the perfect length to prevent the batsmen from scoring.

The grip for an off-break:

1. Hold the ball with the seam in a vertical position. Spread the first and second fingers across the top of the ball on the seam, using your third finger and thumb to support the ball. Use your first finger to spin the ball. Keep your hips and shoulders in line as you land on your right foot. Lean back, maintain the side-on position and look over your left shoulder. Make sure your right foot is parallel to the crease.
2. As you prepare to deliver the ball, start uncoiling your body. Shift the body weight gradually from the back leg to the front leg. Cock your wrist backwards, continue to look at your target over your left shoulder, use the left arm to maintain balance as your right arm comes over.
3. As you release the ball, spin it sharply by moving your first finger downwards and thumb upwards. Make your bowling arm brush past your right ear as it moves downwards. Your body will gain momentum as it uncoils and your weight shifts onto the ball of your left foot. Keep your hand upright throughout the bowling action, drive your back knee forward, and keep your weight on the ball of the front foot.
4. Swivel your upper body on the left knee as you complete the follow through. Your bowling arm should complete its action near the right hip. Your head should remain upright and steady. Your body should have turned 180° from the pre-delivery position. The body weight should be transferred onto your toes as you follow through.





### ***THE OFF-SPINNER'S ARM BALL:***

The arm ball is one of the variations that should be part of every off-spin bowler's armoury.

To bowl the arm ball, the smooth side of the ball should be gripped instead of the seam, as is done while bowling the off-break. The grip should not very tight. The bowler should drag the ball with his shoulder action towards first slip, as he rotates on the front foot. Rather than spin the ball, he should slide the fingers of his bowling hand around its right hand side, keeping the seam pointing towards the first slip. The ball should be pitched either on middle or off-stump, so that it drifts away to bounce outside the off-stump.

### ***THE OFF-SPINNER'S TOP SPINNER:***

Another variation that prevents the off-spin bowler from becoming predictable.

The run-up for bowling the top-spinner is the same as that for bowling the off-break. The grip also remains the same, except that the second finger is bent, so that the ball lies between the first finger and the knuckles of the second finger. The bowling palm should face the head. The ball should be released before the arm reaches the highest point of the swing, so that the ball travels initially in an upward direction towards the batsman. The swing of the arm should be close to the opposite side of the body.

## **LEFT ARM SPIN**



India, widely known as the Land of Spin, has produced two of the greatest exponents of this art, in Vinoo Mankad and Bishan Singh Bedi. Other notable left-arm spinners to have graced the game are the Englishmen Wilfred Rhodes, Hedley Verity and Derek Underwood. Daniel Vettori (New Zealand) and Ashley Giles (England) are keeping this form alive today.

An orthodox left-arm spin bowler turns the ball from the right-hander's leg-stump to the off-stump. Like off-spin, it involves the use of the fingers. The major difference between off-spin and left-arm spin is that the ball turns in the opposite direction.

### **STOCK DELIVERY:**

The left-arm spinner's stock delivery changes direction from the leg-stump to the off-stump after pitching.

The grip for the left-arm spinner's stock ball is the same as that adopted by a right-arm off-spinner to bowl the off-break, as mentioned above. The difference is that the opposite hands and legs come into play.



The left-arm spinner has to flight the ball more in order to vary his line and length, which will enable him to deceive the batsman.

## THE ARM BALL:

The left-arm spinner's arm-ball can be a lethal weapon. It can fetch him lots of wickets if mastered. The left-arm spinner's arm ball turns from the off-stump to the leg-stump. It pitches just outside or on the off stump, and then drifts into the middle or leg stump.

## LEFT-ARM SPINNER'S TOP-SPINNER:

The grip is the same as that used by a right-arm off-spinner to bowl his top-spinner. The opposite hand should be used.

## Fundamentals of Fast Bowling Techniques

There is much more to fast bowling than sprinting towards the batsman, ball in hand, and hurling it towards the stumps with all your might. Fast bowling is an art that can be learnt and honed with regular practice.



This is the beginner's guide to fast bowling:

1. The basic grip: This depends upon the type of delivery you want to bowl. You must master the basic grip and bowling action before trying advanced techniques.

Grip the ball with fingers & not the palm. Put the middle and index fingers on either side of the seam, thumb should be directly underneath. After the bowler has gripped the ball, he should turn it to the side and check the gap between the ball and the 'V' formed by the thumb and index finger.

2. The run-up: For beginners, the run-up must be about 5 to 11 paces long. The run-up should be consistent and comprise big strides, as that helps the bowler get into a smooth and steady rhythm. The bowler will gain momentum if he pumps his arms while running in to bowl.

3. The delivery stage & follow-through:

(A) The bowling action commences at the end of the run-up and includes the delivery & follow-through. Beginners should bowl with a side-on action, the bowling hand under the chin and weight moving from the left foot to the right foot. At the start of the delivery stride, the bowler should take off from the left foot (for right-handers). The body should tilt upwards and the bowler should move his right shoulder towards the batsman. He should fully extend his front arm and focus his eyes on the

wickets at the batsman's end. He should lean his upper body away from the batsman and the rear foot should bend parallel to the bowling crease. The front foot should be extended to gain balance that will propel him forward.

(B) When the bowler lands on his right (rear) foot, he should be side-ways from the point of view of the opposite end. He should bring his left hand above his head and look over the left arm towards the wickets. He should simultaneously start moving his rear leg forward.

(C) He should transfer the body-weight on to his leading foot, bring the front arm down, extend the bowling arm out behind him, and turn his left hip and shoulder towards the batsman.

(D) The bowler should cock his bowling wrist. The bowling arm should be extended upwards and straight to its highest point and the ball should be released. The follow-through begins once the ball is delivered. The head and eyes should be kept steady after delivery, and the bowling arm should be brought down across the body. The left arm will flail upwards & arm backwards. The right knee should be close to the body. The chin should not be dropped in the follow-through.

### ***SWING BOWLING:***

#### ***THE IN-SWING:***

1. The in-swing grip: The bowler should hold the ball with the seam vertical and facing fine-leg. The middle and index fingers should be fairly close together on either side of the seam and the ball should rest on the flat of the thumb. The shiny side of the bowl should face the off-side.
2. The ball should be directed on the line of the off-stump to give it room to swing in flight. The run-up should be straight, but the bowler should aim to release the bowl from slightly wide of the crease.
3. As he approaches the crease, he should be sideways with his arm held high. He should look at the target from 'inside' his bowling arm towards the target. He should lean away from the batsman and keep his front hip in line with the front shoulder.
4. The head should be held straight, eyes on the target. His weight should be transferred from the rear leg to the front leg as he releases the ball.
5. The bowling arm should be kept straight and brought down to the right side of the body with the shoulders facing forward, and the back arm moving backwards upwards. A smooth and relaxed run-up and proper use of the left arm will help the bowler stay balanced.

#### ***THE OUTSWING:***

1. The grip: The ball should be held with the seam vertical and angled towards first slip. The middle and index fingers should be close together on either side of the seam. The ball should rest on the side of the thumb. The shiny side of the ball should be held on the leg- side.

2. (A) The bowler should observe his target over his non-bowling arm, position sideways, the back foot parallel to the crease. He should lean slightly backwards. A raised front leg will help to propel him forward.

(B) He should turn his body to face the wicket as he prepares to release the ball. The leading arm should extend upwards but needs to be completely vertical. The wrist should be cocked until the ball is released. The bowling arm should be straight and the weight should be gradually transferred onto the left foot. The chin must not be dropped.

(C) The bowler should follow-through vigorously; swinging his bowling arm across the body, shoulder and hips faced forward, the left arm swinging upwards and backwards. The right knee should be close to the body.

## Spin bowling

Spin bowling is the most subtle art in cricket and it is the most psychologically demanding. The margin of error is less, as the pace of the delivery is slow. However, the slower pace also ensures that slow bowlers do not stray in line and length as much as fast bowlers. To be a successful spin bowler, one has to relax and maintain muscle control. The spinner should not push the ball through, but deceive the batsman by the flight. This might sound odd, but spin bowlers should work on their relaxation and self-confidence, to achieve benefits like line and length, spin and flight, etc!.



Important bowling skills for spinners are the bowling action and the ability to turn and flight the ball. The spinner has to plan well in advance to meet the challenges and adopt the same according to the situation. Say, you decide not to allow Sachin Tendulkar to paddle-sweep, but he manages to do so. You should then change your plan and try and bowl further outside the off-stump and see what he does. Thinking like this will make you a better bowler.

The quality spinner will study the batsman's stance, grip and height and accordingly adjust his line and length.

Vinoo Mankad, one of the greatest left-arm spinners of all time, was a great exponent of the art of spin bowling. I had the pleasure and privilege to keep wickets to him. I have seen his subtle variations from close quarters.

On other occasions, he would bowl three deliveries with varying degrees of flight but a similar length. To achieve Vinoo's mastery, the bowler should practise for hours in the nets on his own, or with only a wicketkeeper, under the able guidance of his coach.

The slow bowler has to make maximum use of the bowling crease. He should try to deliver the ball from different angles of the crease to vary his deliveries in their flight and line. He should mix his deliveries, bowling some from close to the stumps, others away from the stumps and some from the corner of the crease as well.

The slow bowler should adjust his flight keeping in mind the end from which he is operating. The 'wind factor' will come into play here - whether he is bowling into the wind or with it, or if it is blowing sideways. The leg-spinner and left-arm spinner should bowl against the wind.



In fact, a bowler who gives the ball a lot of air should bowl against the wind. Spinners should also observe the condition of the pitch. On a flat track, the bowler should give the ball more air, and on a turner, he should mix his flight with deliveries of a lower trajectory. Wickets in India tend to crack as the game progresses, and more turn can be extracted by pushing the ball flatter. Spin bowlers should also take advantage of the footmarks created by the fast bowlers at the opposite end and bowl the occasional spell from around the wicket. Shane Warne of Australia and our own Anil Kumble have succeeded in getting wickets or keeping down the runs from an 'around the wicket' line.

Successful spin bowlers have always 'hunted' in pairs like fast bowlers. Earlier, Vinoo Mankad and Subhash Gupte did a great job for India. Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh have the talent and wherewithal to achieve something similar.

If a batsman is playing forward, the spinner should bowl to make him play on the back foot, and vice-versa. If the batsman is playing across the line, the bowler must capitalise on this weakness.

More often, matches are won because of the bowler rather than a batsman. I say this because that is what I have seen happening for years and years, from my position behind the wickets at the batsman's end.