



FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS OF CRICKET

Introduction

Cricket requires a variety of skills that are commonly used in a number of sports. Hand-eye coordination, throwing or catching a ball, balance and intense, long-term concentration are just a few. Through consistent practice and by applying these skills to the elements of cricket, such as a batsman watching the ball at all times, we will see a dramatic improvement in the game. Thus, we will discuss some of the fundamental skills of cricket in this present lesson.

Skills in Cricket

Batting

a) Batting Grip

All successful batting strokes start with an effective grip.

Coaching Points

- With top hand wrap our fingers and thumb around the top of the bat, the thumb and fore-finger should make a "V" shape pointing down the back of the bat, roughly between the center ('splice') and the outside edge of the bat.
- Next, place our bottom on the bat underneath the top hand. Both hands should be next to each other on the bat.

b) Stance

Our stance at the batting crease will enable us to play an effective cricket shot as we will have the correct balance and position in relation to the ball.

Coaching Point

- Our stance should be relaxed with our feet that should be around a shoulder width apart and parallel to the batting crease.
- The top hand should rest gently against the inside thigh of our front leg.
- The knees should be slightly flexed and our weight evenly distributed.

c) Backswing

We may find backswing comfortable to 'tap' our bat in the crease as we prepare for the ball to be delivered for concentration.

Coaching Points

- Stance and Bat Tap - The bat 'tap' should only mean that our wrists and arms move.
- The bat handle should remain close to the body in line with the underneath of our shoulders.
- When we take our backswing, our front shoulder should swing downwards. Our hands should be close to the back/hip with the bat handle close to the body.
- The backswing and step should be in a coordinate movement. Whether you are playing a 'back-foot' shot or a 'front-foot' stroke, the stride should be comfortable and balanced.
- The movement in the stride should be smooth and the head should be in line with the ball that is bowled.

d) Defensive Shots

i. Forward Defensive

This shot is played to a ball of a good length or slightly fuller. If this defensive shot is not played the ball would hit, or pass very close to the stumps.

Coaching Points

- Remember to start with a relaxed balanced stance.
- Take the backswing (bat) and step forward in one motion.
- Take a comfortable stride forward, creating a firm base with the front knee bent.
- Elbow should be bent, pointing towards where the ball is being delivered from, and remains bent throughout the shot.
- The shoulders should rotate vertically as the batsman begins the downswing and decelerates the bat towards the ball.
- The finishing position shows the back heel raise and also to maintain balance.
- The bottom hand should be relaxed.

ii. Backward Defensive

This shot is played to a ball of a good length or slightly shorter that would otherwise hit, or pass over the top of the stumps.

Coaching Points

- Remember to start with a relaxed balanced stance.
- Take the backswing (bat) and step backwards in one motion.
- Take a comfortable stride backwards; creating a firm base, the weight should be slightly forward.
- The shoulders should rotate vertically as the batsman begins the downswing and the bat decelerates towards the ball.
- Contact with the ball is made with the full face of the bat under the eyes of the batsman.

Bowling

Bowlers must understand the principles governing a sound bowling action. A mechanically sound technique can do much to ensure long-term involvement in the game with minimal interruption as a result of injury. Efficiency of technique can produce more effective outcomes in terms of generating power, spin or swing.

Some key aspects of bowling skills are summarized below:

a) Pace Bowling

Quality pace bowling requires a smooth and accelerating run -up, a powerful and efficient bowling action and the capability to vary the line, length and speed of deliveries according to the perceived weaknesses of the batters and the circumstances of the game.

I. Run-Up of bowling

This includes where we are going to bowl, what type of delivery and so on. Looking back now, the run-up, delivery and follow-through are the most important stages of bowling, with run-up as the most important.

The length of a pace bowler's run-up has varied throughout the ages, but essentially it should be as long as needed to generate optimum momentum while enabling the bowler to be strong through the crease. Damien Fleming remarked that, like most young fast bowlers of his time, he initially 'ran in like Dennis Lillie with a high bound in the penultimate stride'. Later in his career, he shortened his run-up from 28 paces to 15.

II. Efficient Delivery

John Harmer offered the following keys to achieving an effective body position in bowling: Leg stability with limited collapsing of the legs throughout the delivery, compactness of the arms so that all force is generated towards the target, and alignment of all body parts inside the width of the bowler's shoulders and an injury-free technique.

b) Spin Bowling

Spin bowling is a complex art that requires guile, effective grips, strong body action and subtle changes in flight to deceive a batter. Ensure that the delivery action is supported by a strong, solid base. Stay tall through the crease, keeping the front leg straight and the leading arm high. Spend as much time on the front leg as possible, and use an up-and-over action to generate the energy required for spinning the ball. The key is not where the ball lands, but how it arrives. A hard-spun delivery with lots of over-spin will cause the ball to dip acutely. If we spin the ball hard, we will have a bigger area of danger. Off-spin bowlers should keep their bowling arms higher than leg spinners do. In both cases, the front shoulder should point towards the target (to optimise rotation) and rotate like an upright wheel rather than sideways like a Frisbee.

c) Swing Bowling

The key to orthodox outswing bowling involves positioning the wrist and fingers behind the ball with the ball angled towards the slips. With the wrist tilted to point, the seam towards the slips and imparted backspin on the ball as the slid fingers down the seam at release. It was critical to maintain a stable seam throughout the flight path. Focused on placing the thumb right along the seam when to to swing the ball. For cutters and slower balls, recommended moving the thumb to one side of the seam.

For reverse swing, noted two strategies seemed to work. Initially, players bowled with a rounded arm action to facilitate reverse inswing. However, in recent times, Victorian fast bowler Shane Harwood and emerging Indian pace bowler Ishant Sharma achieve reverse swing with the seam upright. This fairly recent phenomena in cricket needs further investigation and practice to determine the best method. In all swing bowling, bowlers must shine the ball appropriately to facilitate variation in smoothness on either side of the ball.

Fielding

Fielding in cricket is also as important as batting and bowling. Understanding fielding in cricket seems easy while watching cricket but, there are techniques in fielding and different types of fielding positions in cricket according to the situation of the game.

a) Close Catching

This skill is used when the fielder is placed close to the batsman and requires quick reactions to catch the ball.

- The knees should be bent with the feet width apart in a relaxed position with the weight evenly distributed so that you can react/move quickly towards the ball.
- The hands should be together with the fingers pointing down and when the ball is caught the hands should give into the body if directly hit or give to the side of the body if the ball is left/right.
- Keep the head steady with the eye level and watch the ball at all times.

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b) Catching 'In The Outfield'

I. Deep Catching

This skill is used when fielding usually some distance from the batsman in the outfield or when a batsman hits the ball high into the air and requires good judgment.

Coaching Points

- Move quickly and balanced towards the ball.
- Keep the head steady with the eyes level.

- Keep the hands relaxed and ready.
- Orthodox - hands should be ready to take the ball at, or just above the eye level.
- Reverse - hands should be ready to take the ball above the eye level.
- Hands should give into the body.

Long Barrier

This skill is used when the ball has been hit hard and low usually in the outfield when fielding some distance from the batsman and is used to prevent additional runs being scored through a miss-field such as a four.

Coaching Points

- Watch the ball at all times.
- Should form a barrier at 90° to the path of the ball.
- Should kneel on the 'non-throwing' knee with it placed next to heel of the 'throwing' foot.
- Ensure there is no gap between the two for the ball to escape through.
- Ensure the head is over the ball with the fingers pointing down to collect the ball.
- On collecting the ball, rise and form a strong base before attempting to throw to ensure it is balanced for direction and power of the throw.

Throwing - Grip

When using a real cricket ball we will see a seam on the ball. These tips teach the best method of throwing a cricket ball.

Coaching Points

- Grip the ball across the seam.
- Grip the ball with 2 fingers on top of the ball and the thumb directly underneath, resting on the seam.
- Do not grip the ball in the palm of the hand for easy release.

Throwing - Technique

This is a useful exercise to get the actions of the wrist, elbow and upper body and the effect they have on the throwing technique and to improve the accuracy and power of the throw.

Coaching Points

- **Wrist Flick** - Hold the wrist with non-throwing arm. Using a flicking motion throw the ball, bouncing it towards the target that should be about 3 metres away.
- **Elbow Flick** - This time holding underneath the elbow, flick the ball, bouncing towards a target of around 5 metres away.
- **Upper Body** - Kneeling on one knee (i.e. throwing knee). Ensure the throwing elbow is nice and high (at shoulder level). Should throw towards a target around 10 meters away, ensuring a full follow through with the action.

Overarm Throw

The standing over arm throw skill is required when fielding a reasonable distance from the batsman.

Coaching Points

- Ensure a wide, balanced stance with the throwing arm back.
- Throwing elbow should be at or above the shoulder level.
- Use non-throwing arm as an aid to the direction of the throw.
- Look at the target at all times to ensure the direction of the throw is accurate.
- Back leg should trail after the throw and there should be a full follow through, with the body rotating.

Wicket keeping

Wicket-keeping is a specialist fielding position behind the batsman. The wicket-keeper is the only person legally entitled to wear gloves as a fielding aid. This skill is used when the fielder is placed close to the batsman and requires quick reactions to catch the ball.

Crouch

The crouch is a position that is applied by the wicketkeeper to ensure they are in the best possible position to stop/catch the ball effectively. It also known as the 'Take'. A good stance helps in being balanced and has good mobility to take a catch behind or a stumping.

Coaching Points

1. Crouched, slightly to off side of the batsman.
2. Weight on balls of feet.
3. Relaxed stance.

4. Hands pointing down, fingers together.

'L' Take

This take is good when the ball is pitched up to the batsman and is a good or full length, so the wicketkeeper just moves to the side to take the ball. This will only be applied to a slow/medium bowler or to a spin bowler as the ball will not carry if the wicketkeeper was standing back. This is also a deterrent to stop the batsman using his feet (hopping down the wicket) as they may be stumped if they miss the ball and are out of their crease.

Coaching Points

1. Start in the wicket keeping crouch position when the ball is delivered.
2. Head and body in line with the ball.
3. Hands/ body rises with the bounce of the ball.
4. Hands cup together (so there is no gap) and give to the side of the body with the ball.
5. Watch the ball at all times.

'K' Take

This take is good for short of a length delivery of a high bounce so moving back and crossing in line with the ball. Going back gives more time to react with the ball to catch it and gives the ability to bring the ball back in one continuous motion to stump the batsman.

Coaching Points

1. Start in the wicket keeping stance as the ball is delivered.
2. Step back and across (depending on the line of the delivery.)
3. Rotate body, taking the ball outside of the body to 'give' by rising with the ball.
4. Bring the ball back to the stumps for a stumping.
5. Watch the ball at all times.

Conclusion

Cricket requires a variety of skills that are commonly used in a number of sports. Hand-eye coordination, throwing or catching a ball, balance and intense, long-term concentration are

just a few. Through consistent practice and by applying various skills to the elements of cricket, the skills like batting, bowling, fielding and wicket keeping can be improved and enhanced in a systematic manner.