

# Keeping it Simple



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National Academy Director **PETER MOORES** gives an insight into the Art of Wicket Keeping



### JUDGING THE LENGTH AND LINE OF THE BALL:

The gift of judging length and line comes partly from within a player and partly from experience. They also gain from a lot of repetitions/practices that are closely related to this skill.

Judging the line of the ball is easier than judging the length. To take deliveries which range from middle-and-leg to wide of off stump keepers may move their head into line with the ball without moving their feet. Encourage them to identify the line and put their head in line with the ball early. The challenge to this arrives when the ball goes well down the leg side.

My philosophy of wicket keeping is to keep it simple and not lose sight of the fact that the primary role of the wicket keeper is to catch the ball. As coaches we must not forget this, and we should target our coaching around helping the wicket keeper to develop a simple technique and method that will repeat under pressure. Simplicity will allow his skills to be repeatable, in turn giving consistency, which is essential for any successful keeper.

A large catching area, head over or close to their hands, a natural give with the body and the ability to hold the line and height of the ball are all simple basics that, if worked on, will make a significant improvement to the quality of the keeper.



### STANDING UP:

When they are standing up, encourage wicket keepers to have a shoulder-width or slightly wider stance. This creates a stable and comfortable base. Their inside leg should be in line with middle-and-off stump. Generally, this allows wicket keepers a clear sight of the ball. Some keepers prefer to stand slightly wider. This is also fine, but remember that it creates a further distance to travel when they are taking leg-side deliveries.

A common fault with wicket keepers is that they tend to squat down or, as we say, "get set" too early. To keep it simple, encourage wicket keepers to "get set" as the bowler starts his run-up. This will make the "set" position feel lighter and thus reduce the possibilities of becoming static and slow. Wicket keepers catch the ball once they come out of their stance, not in it, so this method will encourage wicket keepers to come out of the "set" position with better timing, thus encouraging a consistent and repeatable catching method.

Judging the length of the ball comes from rhythm out of the "set" position. In essence, to achieve this rhythm we should encourage wicket keepers to raise their backsides out of the "set" position whilst keeping their hands low. A common fault among coaches working with their wicket keepers is to say, "You are coming up too early." What comes up too early? Generally, players dwell in their "set" position too long, making them feel uncomfortable and tense, particularly as the ball comes toward them. To remedy this, encourage your wicket keepers to start to raise their hands with the bounce of the ball. To do this they will need to raise their backsides first whilst their legs start to straighten. They will come to a position in which their legs will be two-thirds straight whilst their hands are still low to the ground (keeping the arms long and relaxed). Thus, as the ball bounces, they are in a great position to allow their hands to come up with, and take, the ball. Encourage keepers to keep their individuality/style with this method. However, the key to repeatable success is rhythm and keeping it simple.

Shadow batting is a great practice for keepers because you can use a range of distraction methods to "load" up the skill to make it more challenging. The fuller a delivery is, the harder the skill level required. Use shadow throws occasionally to assess head, body and hand positions.

Further skills and drills for close catching and wicket keeping (standing up) can be found on the ECB CA "Wings to Fly Part 3" DVD series - "Standing up for Spin" (Sessions presented by Peter Moores and Paul Farbrace)

### CATCHING AREA:

Encourage wicket keepers to maintain a big catching area. Most professional wicket keepers cross their little fingers, with the strong

hand overlapping the weaker hand. Both hands should butt together with the thumbs out of the way. Rod Marsh used to say it was like opening a book. This is completed by ensuring the fingers point down.

The biggest thing that gets in the way of this large catching area is thumbs. Thumbs are often in the way as a result of the elbows being out. The surface catching area can be literally halved as a result of the elbows being a few inches away from the body. As a batter needs to use the full face of the bat to be more effective and consistent, so the wicket keeper needs to present the full face of the gloves to the ball. Ian Healy was a great exponent of this as he presented the maximum catching area to the ball in a relaxed manner.



Coaches and players should listen for the sound of the ball when it goes into the gloves. It should be a dull thud and one noise only. If it isn't a clean sound, ask yourself the question why. Is it because it is catching a finger or thumb on the way in? Is it because one hand is turning in more than another? Is it because the hands have been in the "set" position too long and snatched at the ball when rising? The sound of the take can high light a lot of variables.

Whether they are standing up or back, encourage wicket keepers to hold the line and the height of the ball. Encourage them to "give" with the ball. What I mean by this is to cushion the ball on contact with the hands by "giving" with the body. This is similar to a boxer "giving" with, or "riding", a punch. The arms and body should together cushion the ball. It is not just the arms that give. You will see professional keepers "give" completely with their arms, but they are mostly doing this for their own rhythm. Encourage junior and club wicket keepers to learn how to cushion the ball first - keep it simple.

### CATCHING A RISING BALL WHEN STANDING UP:

Again, ensure your players keep a large catching area. They should generally be able to maintain this up to about waist height. Once the ball gets higher it is more difficult to keep the elbows in and to keep the catching area large. To help maintain a large catching area they will need to use their hips. Encourage them to turn their hips in the same direction in which the ball is travelling. It is

# Coaches Matter

Winter 2006. Issue No. 4

ECBCA Technical Bulletin. Editor: Chris Dirkin Tel: 0121 440 4332. Email: coaches.association@ecb.co.uk. www.ecbca.co.uk



For standing-back practice look to do the following: practise basic footwork drills in lateral straight lines, with balance to help with leg side takes.

Encourage diving drills where wicket keepers dive and try to keep their head as close to their hands as possible. This will help to produce repeatable and consistent catching. As a general rule of thumb for diving practice, if the ball is low, the dive will finish with a roll backwards; if the ball is high, the dive usually finishes with a roll forwards. Practice both these methods in a suitable soft-landing area. Use a couple of cones a comfortable distance apart, and get them to start from a kneeling position if necessary to build up diving confidence.

Skills and Drills for wicket keeping (standing back) will be found on the new ECB CA "Wings to Fly 4" DVD series "Setting the Pace", coming out in 2007 (Presenter Peter Moores)

### SETTING FIRST SLIP:

I feel this is an area to which we need to pay more attention. Often at the start of a game the fielding side will have three slips and a gully. If you include the wicket keeper, you then have almost half of the team within 15 yards of one another. To ensure first slip is in the right place, you can draw an imaginary diagonal line from the leg-side return crease at the bowler's end through to the offside return crease at the batsman's end. Your first slip should then line up their inside leg on the continuation of this imaginary line. The deeper they are, the wider they will be; the closer they are, the narrower they will become. Encourage wicket keepers to ensure their first slip is standing in a position where they can take the ball at a comfortable height. Second and third slip will take a natural position approximately arm's distance away from one another. This will be gauged originally from first slip's position. Encourage wicket keepers to put first slip in such a position that wicket keepers themselves feel they can cover comfortably any healthy edge.



During practices get first slip involved. Get them to wear a helmet just in case the ball comes off the wicket keeper's glove. We want to do this because we want both of them to feel comfortable and also to build up catching confidence between both individuals.

When good keepers are standing up to medium-pacers, encourage them to set first slip narrower. We wish them to do this because it can be difficult for slip to sight the ball, as it often comes over the wicket keeper's gloves, keepers also are less likely to cover the same area as they would if they were standing back. First slip should still be standing the same distance back, whether the keeper is standing up or back.

### KEEPING THE FIELDING "CLEAN":

It's an area of the game which is difficult to learn without the experience of playing. For a coach patience is the key; a lot of young keepers find this area of the game hard initially. The key to keeping the fielding "clean" is decision-making and not being casual. Encourage keepers to be decisive, either to collect the ball on the full (it protects the condition of the ball) or to take it on the bounce at waist height. The most important thing is not to be casual. Encourage them to remain as focused as they would be when the bowler is bowling, and to take pride when receiving the ball from the field. If there is a run-out chance the same principles apply to the take as would apply if the keeper was standing up to a bowler.

Wicket keepers are like captains of fielding teams and a focal point for fielders. Fielders on average will touch the ball 20 - 30 times in a game, so they can make a really good statement to the batting team by returning the ball successfully to the keeper. Encourage your wicket keepers to want the ball. Once they have it, they can then decide to pass the ball on to whom they wish.

### LOOKING FOR NEW WICKET KEEPERS:

I would encourage club coaches looking for new wicket keepers to look for players with an enthusiasm and drive to do it, with general coordination skills, with a decent catching sense, and with the willingness to learn as the skill levels become harder. We as coaches can support our players through this harder process, but above all else we should remember to teach the basics well and to keep them as simple as possible.