

## **POSITIONING: UMPIRE AT THE BOWLER'S END**

**There is little doubt that the pace of the game at all levels has increased.** This has been prompted by the widespread acceptance of the shorter form of the game focusing the minds of cricketers on higher run-rates and playing more attacking strokes. Add to this the improvements in equipment used and facilities available, and there is little doubt the game has developed.

With this development has come a renewed expectation that the umpires will continue to be able to effectively play out their role and, in particular, continue to move to the best possible positions at all times to adjudicate on decisions that need to be made. The tragic circumstances of the death of Alwyn Jenkins during a League match last July acts as a reminder as to how vulnerable we can be, and all umpires need to be aware of their own safety as well as that of the players.

This short article is focusing only on the umpire at the bowler's end moving into position to adjudicate a run-out at his end.

The first thing to establish is that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' side for the bowler's end umpire to move to in relation to where the ball has been played or deflected. There are however 'good' and 'better' positions to get into when moving into position to adjudicate on run-outs.

At the time that a run is taken there can be no time for a considered movement, and effective umpires train themselves to respond instantly. An appropriate amount of practice in a safe environment is recommended to allow your responses to become automatic and hence sharpen both your awareness and movement.

The established thinking of moving to the side of the direction of the ball on many occasions will be the better position. But what about when the ball has been struck to the mid-on/mid-off area of the field (the 'V')? The challenge is to identify a trigger to allow you to move instantly to the other side at these important times. There are no second chances and your first movement is the only chance you have to achieve the best position.

It is logical to suggest that the higher the standard of cricket being played, the quicker the umpire needs to move into position since the harder and faster the ball is struck and thrown, the less reaction time there is. Sometimes it will not be until you experience this difference that you will fully appreciate the significant increase of pace and reduction of reaction time. At all levels of cricket there is potential for serious injury, and to reduce the chance of this - and unnecessary interference in the running of the game - your positioning needs to be fully thought through in a prepared and effective strategy.

The priorities for the umpire at the bowler's end when moving into position to adjudicate a run-out are as follows:

- 1 Watch the ball
- 2 Move to level with the Popping Crease
- 3 Depth to provide a clearer view of the whole event
- 4 Be still with your head level at the instant an appeal is made (when the decision has to be made)

The first priority never changes and is the key to enabling you to be able to react quickly and in the best way when moving from the bowler's end wicket. This is how it works:

If the ball is struck to mid-on/mid-off and you physically turn to watch the ball, making sure that you rotate your hips in doing so, then there is only one way that your body will be able to move sharply. The direction is backwards and, helpfully, takes you away from the probable trajectory of any attempt to throw the ball either at the wicket or to a fielder at your end. As soon as you are alert to the need to move, this action will take you to the better position immediately.

This is a technique used very successfully by first-class umpires since it was demonstrated to them by Mervyn Kitchen in his role as ECB Umpire Coach.

#### Tech-Tactic Tips

While at the bowler's end, umpires need to be aware of the changing environment around them.

The most effective umpires will:

- T Watch the ball at every opportunity
- T Move efficiently and effectively
- T React positively to the play as it unfolds and be one step ahead
- T Remain in control of their movements

### **POSITIONING: UMPIRE AT THE STRIKER'S END**

Umpires while standing at the striker's end are able to read the game from a completely different perspective from the intensity and scrutiny required when at the bowler's end. Nevertheless there is as much scope for danger while standing at this end and as much to be vigilant for in order to be proficient and safe.

The skill of the effective umpire is the ability to be able to be looking at the right thing at the right time and an acceptance that you are not able to look at everything all of the time is necessary but implies that the correct priorities need to be in place.

Much is discussed about whether the striker's end umpire is better standing on the leg or off side – especially when faced with a combination of right and left handed batsmen. Those who are convinced that there is always a need for the umpire to be standing on the leg side of the striker should just consider whether at times it could be better to consider the alternative depending on the fielders' positions and you own viewing priorities.

In matches where there are tight over rates in place and fielding restrictions are in place and need to be enforced are such examples of when it might be preferential to remain on one side or the other for the duration of the innings to optimise the chances of ensuring the field restriction playing conditions are followed. However, this is something for individuals to consider and they should not feel that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' side. As mentioned in the positioning at the bowler's end, there are good positions and better positions and the important thing is to have your reasons for the side you choose rather than just going where convention takes you. Whatever you decide it is imperative that the captain of the fielding side is kept informed of your intentions.

In addition to the vast array of areas to be observed while positioned at the striker's end the most important time in the game for you is whenever runs are scored. The ability to keep your eye on the ball will always enable you to focus on the action while at the same time keeping you safe from the unexpected wayward throw from a fielder. This has to be combined with the appropriate glances as each batsman makes his ground at the striker's end as well as a continued awareness of where players are.

Some umpires find it effective to physically turn so that they are standing more sideways on once the ball is hit keeping the ball in view for the vast majority of the time. This provides the umpire with a good view of the batsmen running and at the same time the ability to scrutinise the actions of the fielders and the ability to offer any help required to their colleague as necessary. Most importantly however if you are watching the ball you will be able to keep yourself safe from being struck by the ball which has to be the highest priority of all.

The priorities for the umpire at the striker's end when runs are being scored or when the ball is struck behind you are as follows:

- 1 Watch the ball with glances to maintain appropriate awareness on batsmen's movements.
- 2 If necessary turn your body to optimise your views and maintain awareness of batsmen's positions.
- 3 Be still with your head level at the instant an appeal is made (when the decision has to be made), and in line with the popping crease.