

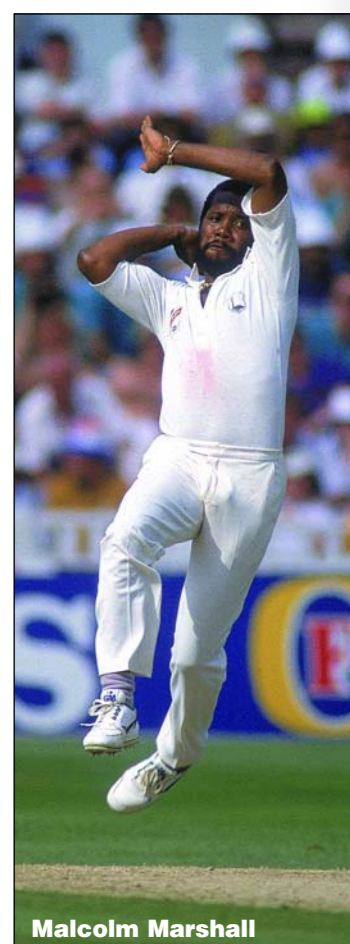
# Coaches Matter

ECB Coaches Association Technical Bulletin in partnership with the ECB Coach Education Office  
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## In the swing



Allan Donald



Malcolm Marshall



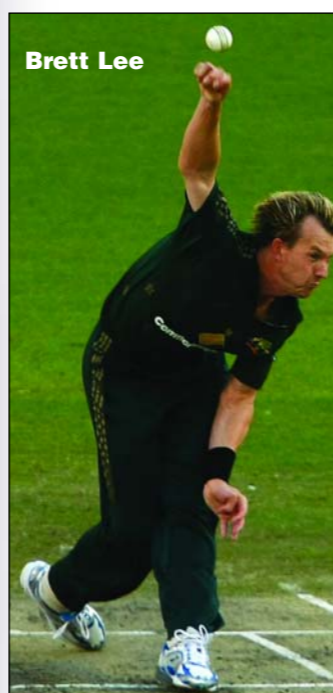
Sir Richard Hadlee



Chaminda Vaas



Matthew Hoggard



Brett Lee

## IN THE SWING



As the new international season has started we took the opportunity to catch up with the England Fast Bowling Coach, Ottis Gibson to discuss the much debated topic of swing bowling.

The skill of swing bowling has been the staple diet of many a successful county cricketer over the years and with the success of Matthew Hoggard and more recently Ryan Sidebottom the skill is more and more prevalent in the make up of the England bowling attack.

Gibson has developed his philosophy over a long playing career that yielded over 650 first class wickets and culminated in the fast bowler winning the PCA Player of the Year in 2007. Ottis took up post as England Fast Bowling Coach at the end of the 2007 season after a number of years working with England's up and coming bowlers at the National Cricket Performance Centre.

The art of swing bowling is one that has been around for a long time with a variety of explanations as to why the ball swings some days but not others. The mystery surrounding the skill some ways extenuates the fascination and infatuation we have with it. There are however a few fundamentals to swing bowling and no more so than the individuality of each and every bowler. Our job as coaches is

to decipher the ever growing bank of scientific research that is out there and come up with simple ways of relaying relevant information to bowlers in the field.

Gibson says 'Coaches sometimes focus too much on the science behind the bowling action but it is important to understand that swing bowling is very much an art that is developed over time by a bowler.



**Grip** - The grip for any swing bowler is vital but every bowler is different and it is not easy to say to a bowler you must hold it like this or that.' Gibson believes it is often a case of trial and error. 'One thing that has an effect on the ball at release is the thumb but again this is something that is individual to the bowler. Many bowlers favour the thumb resting on a particular side of the seam with others preferring the neutral position of the thumb on the seam underneath the ball.'

**Release Position** - For Gibson it doesn't matter what type of action a bowler has it is all about the release position and more important the wrist action on the ball. 'There are a number of factors that effect the wrist position at release but the fundamentals of a balanced position at the crease during delivery with a balanced approach and gather remain the same whether you are a medium pacer, out an out quick bowler or even a spinner.'

The wrist should remain behind the ball with the seam pointing towards first slip or leg slip depending on whether the bowler is looking to bowl in swing or out swing. During release Gibson is a believer in working the fingers down the back of the ball to maintain an upright, first slip pointing seam (outswing) with the ball rotating back towards point of release.

Gibson highlights that 'problems seem to occur when bowlers are unable to maintain an effective wrist position and therefore cut across the ball. 'Many coaches will refer to this as a collapsed wrist and therefore the seam is seen to wobble and therefore reduces the likelihood of the ball swinging.

Bowlers learn in different ways but generally it is important to allow them to develop a 'feel' for an effective release position that enables the ball to deviate in line through the air.

A drill Gibson sometimes uses is to get the bowler to throw the ball, which in its nature can be seen as alien to the bowling action, but it allows the bowler to develop a 'feel' for the wrist position that enables the ball to swing. In club, district and county age group cricket it is a good idea for players giving throw downs to concentrate on wrist position and making the bowl swing - the outcome is two fold as the batters preparation is more realistic and the bowlers develop the feel for the release position and wrist action.

Like a spin bowler who spins the ball from hand to hand to practice imparting spin on the ball a swing bowler can lie on



their back and throw the ball in the air concentrating on the wrist action, seam position and rotation on the ball. The use of a red and white cricket ball is the ideal way to assess the wrist position and seam position especially if you do not have access to a video analysis system.

### Theories

Gibson suggests 'you hear a wide ranging set of theories around swing bowling and a common one seems to be that there is an optimum speed to bowl the ball to make it swing. If this was the case you wouldn't see Brett Lee or Allan Donald in his prime swinging the bowl at 90+ mph or indeed Hoggard, Sidebottom or Chaminda Vaas who consistently bowl in the low 80's'.

Ottis goes on to discuss bowling actions, 'I have mentioned actions but there are many differing actions out there. There are subtle differences between Hoggard and Sidebottom - with Hoggard bowling around his body whilst Sidebottom is high and over the top but when they are both on song the wrist position is consistent and works down the

back of the ball. Malcolm Marshall was open chested but he could beat the bat on both sides. Richard Hadlee through a subtle change in wrist position was able to shape the ball back into the batter.' Ottis believes the most effective swing bowler he has come across was Phil Newport. Without wanting to labour the point his wrist position was fantastic' says Gibson. There are no set rules regarding actions but there is no compromise on Ottis' part around the all important wrist position at release.

### Bowling Strategy

There is always one given in cricket: The stumps don't move! Encouraging bowlers to hit the top of off stump can only be a positive thing which ever way they swing the ball. The success of Hoggard and Sidebottom has come from their ability to consistently deliver the ball in the right areas and even when the ball is not swinging they are constantly asking questions of the batter.

Another important aspect is the head position and where the bowler should look when delivering the ball - Where does Phil Taylor focus when throwing the dart? His eyes and head remain still and focussed on the target and his arm and body action follow - inevitably more often than not hitting the treble. Gibson suggests it is the same with a bowler, 'by focussing on the desired target your head remains still and the likelihood is you will be successful.'

Gibson goes on to say 'Bowlers should focus on the place they want to pitch that particular delivery. The simplest drills are target drills which become very useful when practicing for one day games. The bowlers are tasked with hitting cones at a variety of lines and lengths emulating yorkers, bouncers and slower balls.



The subject is difficult to cover in such a small print space but the philosophy of any bowler is really quite simple:

- Release Position and Wrist Action down the back of the ball
- You can swing the ball round corners but you need to be able to control it to hit the right areas - Remember the Stumps never move!
- Some days it just doesn't swing - No one knows why, it just doesn't.

Gibson finishes by re-emphasising the fact that every bowler is different and there is a process of trial and error involved when trying to induce swing but by working on the release position your bowler will start to understand.

