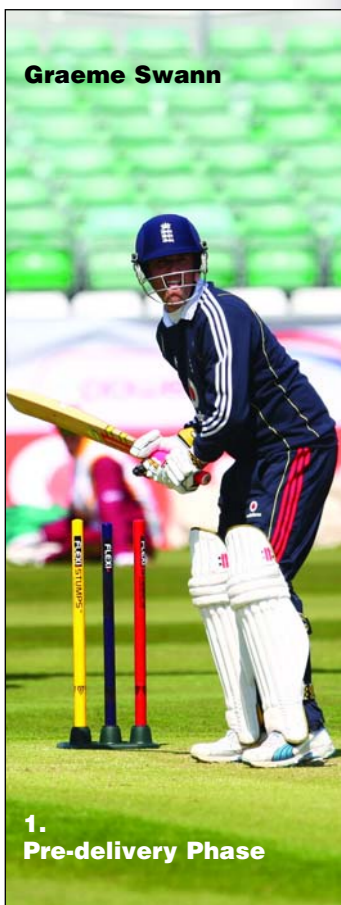


Coaches Matter

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The Three Phases of Batting



1. Pre-delivery Phase



2. Decision Making Phase



3. Shot Execution



1. Pre-delivery Phase



2. Decision Making Phase



3. Shot Execution



Dene Hills, ECB Lead Batting Coach

Anyone choosing to swap the golden sands and glorious climate of Tasmania for the considerably less enticing East Midlands would normally need to be escorted away by men in white coats (of the psychiatric, rather than umpiring variety). Even the most ardent fans of the Loughborough University campus would begrudgingly admit the move would be a sacrifice made only by the most driven, motivated and focused of individuals.

Meet Dene Hills. He is the man who traded a comfortable life as one of Australia's leading coaching gurus to help England's batsmen fulfil their potential. He is on a mission, having deserted life in one of the most attractive climates to toil away on behalf of English cricket.

"I had a good talk with Troy (Cooley) before I took the job", says Hills. I needed to know what it was like over here and how the system worked, because it was a big decision to move. Troy had only positive things to say, and he was right. It's a great challenge and I'm really enjoying it".

Hills is the ECB Lead Batting Coach, based at the state of the art National Cricket Performance Centre at Loughborough University. He looks after batters at the top end of the game, including the Test players, through those on the fringe of the national team, down to the next generation of emerging talent. Put simply, he is in charge of making sure England score enough runs in the next ten years.

"My main role is to make sure that the next generation of English batsmen are progressing as they should be. We're trying to make

sure this group are ready to make the step up to full international level when required. There's no shortage of talent. It's a matter of making sure these guys maximise their potential."

He is a typically straight talking antipodean who combines knowledge gathered during a successful playing career with his time working with arguably the greatest ever Australian team, in his capacity as an assistant coach.

His philosophy when it comes to batting coaching is simple. When training he is keen for players to make evaluations on their own performance. "Get batters to tell you how often they hit the ball right out the middle of the bat", he suggests. "We want players who can hit the ball with the middle of the bat every time". Simple enough, but so often in a net environment a player only half hits the ball, and is satisfied with strikes of the ball that would never cross the ropes.

He is passionate about preventing the next generation becoming robotic. "Allow the unorthodox if it is effective", is one of his key messages that seems particularly pertinent bearing in mind the added demands of the booming short form of the game. He is also a big believer in getting batters involved in as many game situations as possible. "Of course in the UK we have to spend more time training our players indoors, but whenever possible we need to get them out in the middle. I'm very interested in the balance between learning and playing. Indoor nets are useful, but not as useful as time in the middle." Just for a moment you sense he is rueing all those hours of sunshine he has left behind in Oz, as he gazes out the window to the typically grey leaden skies of Loughborough.

The Three Phases of Batting



Ravi Bopara

1. PRE-DELIVERY PHASE:

Different players do different things very successfully. There are no hard rules here but a batter does need a starting point. Some players shuffle while others stand still.

- The engine needs to be on, so allow players to get moving.
- The best batters learn lots about the delivery from the bowler's approach. They focus on the hand holding the ball when the bowler is about to gather.



Focus on the bowler's hand holding the ball pre-delivery

- As coaches we seem to spend a lot of time studying trigger movements/pre delivery movements. As long as they are consistent and allow a player to perform phases 2 and 3 effectively anything goes. The best players are simple and efficient.

2. DECISION MAKING PHASE:

This starts at the moment the ball is released. At this stage both eyes will be fixed on the ball and still. The key is for batters to be well balanced on release.

- At this early stage the world's best have an intention in mind against extreme pace, so the body anticipates and starts to move, but the head remains locked still. Ricky Ponting is three inches off the ground with his front foot at the moment the ball is released.



2

A full swing of the bat running tight to the body is to be encouraged for generating maximum power. The backswing should be open faced (the face of the bat towards point) to increase bat speed, rather than closed (the face of the bat towards the ground) which results in slower bat speed. The top hand is very dominant at this stage.

- The eyes watch the ball from the hand. The best players are then able to judge length very early and move accordingly.
- As coaches we need to avoid producing robotic players who move awkwardly. The best players all have smooth, fast and natural movements.

3. SHOT EXECUTION:

It sounds obvious, but the batter is trying to hit the ball with the middle of the bat every delivery. It is worth getting players to make evaluations on how cleanly they strike the ball with the middle of the bat during practice.

- To hit the middle of the bat every ball, the full face needs to be presented.
- Balance is again the key. Good balance will allow the ball to be hit with power and precision. It is essential to have a good stable base from which to hit the ball. This is achieved with neat and quick footwork.
- The bat speed is crucial if power is to be generated.
- On contact the head needs to be over the ball regardless of the shot being played.



Try to hit the ball with the middle of the bat every delivery



3

Dene's idea on drills and practices:

Getting the balance between learning and playing is important. I like to get players into as many game situations as possible.

- All my practices are geared around having a positive approach against spin, and I encourage players to have intention to get on the front foot against pace.



- I do a lot of practice sessions involving running between the wickets. Get the non striker to be in a power position (like a sprinter) ready to go. We also work on getting in and out the crease when turning between runs.

- There is a place for repetition drills, nets and indoor practice, but the experience of match situations is invaluable. Time in the middle is what batting is all about, so where possible set up practices in the middle so batters get use to that unique environment.

Dene Hills was appointed the ECB Lead for Batting in October 2009. He was speaking to the ECB Head Coach - Lead Tutor, Tim Deller. For a full interview with Dene Hills, and more information on his coaching philosophy and batting ideas, log on to www.ecbca.co.uk.