

Revealed: The Psychological Side of Cricket and How You Can Use it to Become a Better Cricketer!

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The Mental and Psychological Side of Cricket – Batting

When you watch cricket on television, it can appear to be quite an easy and simple sport, but under the helmet of the batter, there is a whole different game going on inside the batters mind in an attempt to banish any possible distractions, and focus every bit of mental energy on the ball as it is released from the bowlers hand, this is the **psychological side to batting**.

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As a batter, your aim is to score runs, stay in and help your team reach a certain particular target. To achieve this, you need to be in the correct mental state. To help reach this state of fierce concentration there are several things that you must do.

Firstly, you need to be clear your mind of any possible distractions, distractions can come in many forms; these may be concerns about the pitch, fielder's comments, being scared of the ball, fear of getting out etc. These matters need to be cleared out of the head prior to the start of the bowlers run up to allow for the stages of concentration that will soon follow, this is vital, if there are distractions floating around your mind, you are sure not to be focussing to your optimum level and are more likely to make a mistake.

Every ball requires you to concentrate at your highest possible levels, and in so you should have a strategy to help you concentrate. I was taught by a prominent cricketing figure this following method that I find extremely useful in exploiting my maximum concentration levels. Firstly, after clearing all distractions from your mind, as the bowler starts to run up, you should enter a state of fine focus, in this state, your mind should have no negative thoughts and be concentrating on the top half of the bowler, your vision should be like a television, only focussed in on the top half of the bowler as he approaches, in this period you should have constructive positive thoughts, for example I say to myself over and over "Focus, watch the ball, focus, watch the ball" etc... By doing this and saying positive statements, it stops negative thoughts entering the mind and also stops any possible distractions drifting into your thoughts.

As the bowler enters his final steps your focus level should increase to what is commonly known as a state of fierce focus, in this stage all mental powers should be focusing on the ball and the ball only, your mental screen should now just be the size of the ball. This allows your brain to compute and work out the line, length and flight of the ball and so gives you the maximum amount of time to help you get your feet and body into position as early as possible helping giving you the best possible chances of making a good decision and playing a good shot.

This should be applied to nets as well as matches as this will get you well trained and so it becomes second nature.

The Mental and Psychological side to Cricket - Bowling

As a bowler, like batting, to gain optimum results, there are certain thought processes that need to take place. Again, like batting you need to eradicate possible distractions from your mind as you prepare to bowl, such distractions include worries about the batsmen "hitting out", fear of making mistakes e.g. bowling down the leg side/a wide etc. With negative thoughts running through your mind, you are much more likely to tense up and make mistakes, your thought patterns should always remain positive.

Bowlers need a game plan (I discuss game plans in another article), and they should plan their next ball as they are walking back to their mark. If you are deciding what ball you are going to bowl while you run up, then you are likely to get caught in two minds and make mistakes. If you decide prior to starting your run up what type of ball you are going to bowl, e.g. slower ball, it gives you the opportunity to really focus and concentrate on how and where you want to pitch the ball. How you go about deciding where about you focus on e.g. the base of off stump, or where you want to pitch the ball is very much a personal matter which should be worked out in nets as everyone is different.

The Mental and Psychological Side of Cricket – Game Plans

During a game of cricket there are a variety of mental battles taking place, and for you to succeed it is important for you to understand this and come out on top.

Bowling – as a bowler when a batsman comes to the crease you need to instantly start analysing the batter, just by the way the batter is set up can tell you a great deal about the batters style of play. For example, if a batter comes to the crease and holds the bat with a low a grip, then he is more likely to be a good cutter/puller of the ball and play

square of the wicket, if he has a high grip, then he's more likely to be looking to play straight. If the batter stands quite far to leg, then he's going to be looking to play through the off side, to combat this you should bowl a outside off stump opposed to off stump, this should give you a good chance of getting him out caught behind as he reaches for the ball. Furthermore, the pitch should be watched carefully too, pitches with variable bounce, slight oddities etc, and can be used to the bowler's advantage, it's extremely important to identify these factors and then utilise them.

Once you have worked a batter out, you increase your chances of getting the batter out significantly if you bowl to a plan, and certainly restrict the runs of a batter. When batters are struggling to score runs, they are more likely to play rash shots, and give their wicket away, this is another important point, if you slow the run rate, and batsmen lose patience and often get out trying to speed it up. This in cricket is known as a "squeeze wicket", this is because you squeeze the run rate and force the batter into playing false shots to speed the run rate up. This is why it is important to bowl to a plan, cricket is a thinking game, and often to succeed, you need to outthink your opposition.

Batting – Like bowling, a batter needs a game plan, through nets and practise, you need to learn your game, you need to know which are your strong, risk free shots, and which shots are not always so reliable. By knowing your game, at the start of an innings before you get your eye in, you should revolve your game around your strong risk free shots, the ones that bring safe, risk free runs and resist the urge to play slightly more high risk shots earlier in the innings e.g. the hook. Once you know your game you can really utilise this and score runs safely until you get your eye in before moving onto slightly more elaborative shots later in your innings. It is important now, that whenever you are in nets you analyse your game closely, and really work out where your strengths lie. If you desire building large inning's, then you have to start using your strengths and build on them, **you must know your game!**