

MASTERCLASS

FOR ANY
YOUNG LADS
OUTTHERE...



THE BATTING DOCTOR

Having considered the basics of batting in my previous batting surgeries, I'm going to look at some of the technical issues facing particular Test batsmen, **writes Gary Palmer**. I hope this will help those of you who are serious about improving your game – and those of you looking to understand the game better, as spectators.

CASE STUDY: ALASTAIR COOK

Alastair Cook has been one of the most successful young batsmen England have ever had. However, I believe, after close observation, that he still has some technical issues when facing spin bowling.

The problem, I think, is the direction in which he plants his front foot down the wicket when he is playing spinners. I believe that, too often, he plants his foot straight back down the initial line of the ball – rather than taking account of the direction in which the ball is going to spin.

For example: if a spinner is, generally, turning the ball in towards your legs, your front foot should be placed more openly –

ie straight back down the wicket – rather than back towards the point of delivery. This means that when the ball turns, it comes into your 'hitting area' – the line where the bat can swing most freely in a straight line towards the ball.

If, instead, you plant your front foot towards the original line of the ball, you end up playing around your front pad. This means you are unable to bring the full face of the bat down in a straight line: your pad is in the way. You're playing with half a bat and limiting both your scoring opportunities and your control of the impact of bat on ball.

WHAT TO DO v THE SPINNERS

If Cook were to open his stance slightly and adopt a target area between straight mid on and mid wicket he will find it much easier to play the ball turning in to him.

As a left hander, scoring down the ground is the best option because it minimises the risks of getting out. To hit the spinners down the ground, the key is to

put your front foot to the correct side of the ball so that the ball turns to the position where you can make the best contact. This position is in line with your head or as close as possible to being in line. From back swing to the completion of the shot, the bat needs to swing in as straight a line as possible through the target area.

If the ball is turning towards you then your foot and leg should open out towards the leg side. At this point you are playing with the spin.

If the ball is generally turning away from you, then you need to step inside the line of where the ball pitches ie your front foot needs to be pointing across the original line of the ball. By the time the ball has turned away from you, it will be under your eyes and in line with your optimum hitting area.

To get your body aligned to playing the ball spinning away from – or across – you, you need to point your front and, more importantly, your back foot up the wicket. This will align your hips perfectly to play the shot. This will allow you good access to



the ball even if you want to play the ball against the spin and in to the leg side

When the ball is turning away on middle on off line then you would look to plant the front foot slightly to the leg side of the ball (in line with the inside of the front foot but forward of the body. The inside of your big toe should be touching the ground and your back heel should be off the ground. It is of vital importance that you make contact with the ball forwards of the front pad: let the ball come to you prior to contact.

Having your back heel off the ground enables you to get your head as far forward as possible, so lengthening his hitting zone when driving.

It is even more important that you – and Alastair Cook – push your head to the ball prior to contact rather than your shoulder. Making these minor changes would widen Cook's scoring areas and make him less vulnerable to getting out.

Gary Palmer has been batting coach to many county and international teams and players and has helped a series of young players from outside the system to win county contracts. For info on courses and one-to-one coaching: ccmacademy.co.uk

in practice

Picture 1 shows the correct position to play the ball turning in from on or just out side off stump: the front foot is planted up the wicket to the leg side of the original line of the ball, allowing for the spin. The back foot is turned in so the feet and hips are well aligned to the target area so that when the ball turns in the bat now can swing in a straight line from backswing to contact with good access to the ball.

Picture 2 shows the correct way to play the ball pitching on leg and moving away from you. Rather than planting your foot back towards the original line of the ball – which can mean playing away from your body and leaving a gap between bat and pad – you put your front foot straight down the pitch, waiting for the ball to come into your hitting area. As with (1) this technique gives you the best chance of clean, full-face contact with the ball.



AYRTEK HELMETS

What are they? New-tech batting helmets that look, to us, a bit like baseball helmets. More

importantly, they are, say manufacturers, lighter, more resilient and more comfortable than traditional models. Ayrtek say that tests show their 'airbag'-style liner offers 300 per cent more protection than a traditional polystyrene liner. Not content with that, the company has also worked at making the shell both lighter and stronger – the carbon fibre used in their top of the range product is, they say, not just four times stronger than traditional products but also 40 per cent lighter.

Who's wearing them? Middlesex's Tim Murtagh and Steve Finn wore them at the Stanford week in Antigua last November and Paul Nixon also trialled one during the most recent ICL tournament. Expect to see more county batters wearing them this summer.

Why is it more comfortable? Because rather than just being plonked on your head, the Ayrtek helmet fits exactly to the shape of your noggin: there's an air-filled liner that you pump up after you've put the helmet on, tailoring the fit perfectly.

Who's behind it? Tom Millsom. Previously, he used similar ideas, gleaned from his university thesis, to develop a range of gloves and pads for Canterbury. After cricket, he's looking to use the air-liner technology in safety gear in other fields, including skiing.

Costs? Helmets with a plastic shell and the air-liner technology are £59. The top-of-the-range carbon fibre model is £99.

Where from? Ayrtek helmets are only available on the web right now: ayrtek.com

