

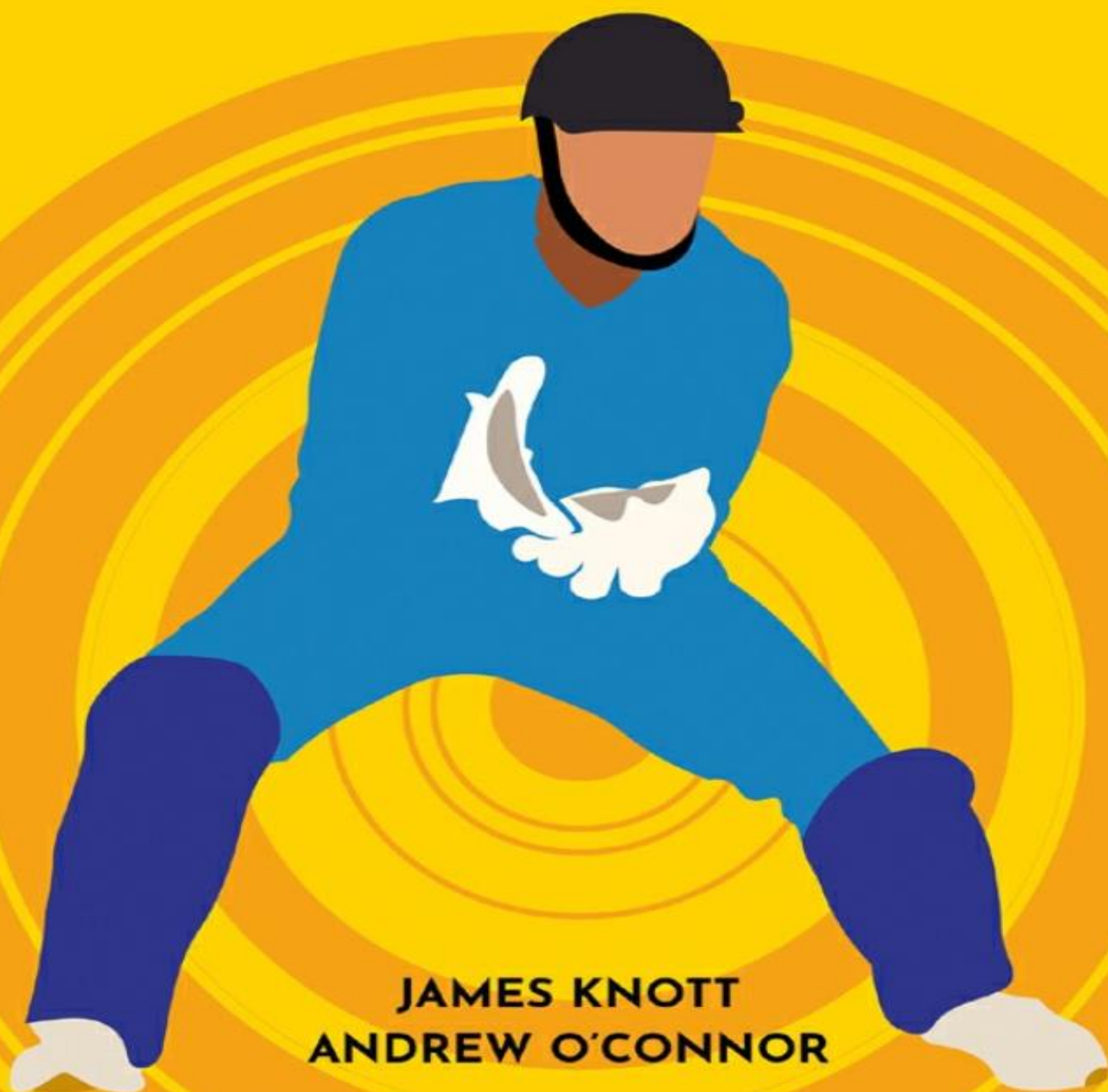
'This book will take you step-by-step through everything you require to
be a top player and coach in the amazing world of wicketkeeping'

KEVIN INNES, ACADEMY DIRECTOR, NORTANTS CCC

WICKETKEEPING

**A COMPREHENSIVE MODERN GUIDE
FOR CRICKET PLAYERS AND COACHES**

FOREWORD BY ALEC STEWART



**JAMES KNOTT
ANDREW O'CONNOR**

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‘This book will take you through step by step everything you require to be a top wicket keeper and coach in the amazing world of wicketkeeping’

KEVIN INNES, ACADEMY DIRECTOR, NORTHANTS CCC

‘An excellent guide for wicketkeepers and coaches alike – full of key details across all aspects of a keeper’s role and very easy to read’

RICHARD HUDSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CRICKET BOARD

‘A proper insight into the life of the modern-day wicketkeeper. The mix of experienced review and coaching drills offers the reader a real opportunity to realise his/her potential in a number of ways’

JONNY CATER, OXFORDSHIRE CCC CAPTAIN

‘excellent . . . covers every aspect of wicketkeeping clearly and accurately’

CALLUM MORIN, WICKETKEEPER, HADLEIGH CRICKET CLUB

‘A fantastically detailed and clear look into the art of wicketkeeping’

PHIL ARNOLD, STOWE 1ST XI CRICKET COACH

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FOREWORD BY
ALEC STEWART

*With contributions from
Jack Russell, Alan Knott, David Ripley,
Ben Duckett, Tom & Peter Moores*

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FOREWORD

If there is one thing about wicketkeeping that sets it apart from other specialist roles in cricket, it is that it can be a lonely business. Batters and bowlers always have company. As a keeper you are very often left on your own and because you wear gloves everyone assumes you will catch every ball that comes your way. I can promise you it is not as easy as that!

Some would also argue that the pure art of keeping wicket is a lost one. The most natural keepers no longer come to the fore as a greater onus is placed upon runs produced than chances taken behind the stumps. The modern game demands that a balance is struck between the two and at times it would be fair to suggest it is now weighted too greatly towards the batting side of the equation.

There is no debate that I was a batsman who became a wicketkeeper and that my keeping improved the longer I did it for. The fact is that I only really began learning to keep wicket while playing for England. It sounds ridiculous but it is true. Due to the presence of an England international wicketkeeper in Jack Richards when I came through at Surrey, there was no reason for me to devote too much time to my keeping as my way into the first team would be as a top-order batsman. I kept wicket each winter for Midland-Guildford CC in Perth Grade cricket in Australia before making my England debut as I realised early on in my career how valuable it would be to have another string to my bow and I always had a huge desire to get better as a cricketer in whatever way I could.

The brilliant Alan Knott, the father of the co-author of this book, helped me tremendously while he was wicketkeeping coach to the England team during the 1990s. He deserves huge credit for helping me get to the

point where at the start of the international winter of 1996-97 I was told I would be the first-choice keeper.

I also gained a great deal from training with, listening to and watching the man who wore the gloves when I first started with England, my great mate Jack Russell – exactly how he practised and what went into his preparation. Like any top batter or bowler, things always look slightly different when they are done by the very best. The ball melts into the gloves of a high-class keeper.

I played with and against some top-class wicketkeepers during my first-class career spanning 22 years. In addition to Russell, who was the best English keeper I played with, the other man who stood out for me was Keith Piper of Warwickshire. I maintain he was the best keeper not to win an England cap. His glovework was exceptional, both stood back to the extreme pace of Allan Donald or up to the stumps, and he arguably suffered when it came to higher honours for being one of those pure glovemen whose batting was not quite good enough.

The skill of standing up to the seamers in limited-overs cricket was an essential part of the wicketkeeper's job in the 80s and 90s and it is arguably no coincidence that the teams of Russell and Piper – Gloucestershire and Warwickshire – were so successful. Moments of brilliance, like leg-side stumpings, would often prove to be match-defining ones.

That work up to the stumps arguably sets the very best apart from the very good, and Ian Healy is a case in point. He was the number-one wicketkeeper I came up against in international cricket. His work to Shane Warne in particular, reacting to those huge leg breaks, especially when Warne bowled around the wicket into the rough, and reading the variations was outstanding.

As people have become used to more runs, scored more quickly, across all formats, there are fewer out-and-out keepers these days – you have to be looked upon as an all-rounder now, so the way you bat and the runs you score are crucial. James Foster, as pure a gloveman as you could wish to see, would be the one keeper in recent times to have missed out on a vast number of England Test caps due to the selectors picking superior

batsmen-keepers ahead of him. Ben Foakes, the 67th man handed the gloves by England in Test cricket, is currently the best gloveman in the world in my opinion and he has shown he can bat at the highest level too when posting a hundred on his Test debut. Despite this, the England selectors are currently picking perceived better batsmen-keepers ahead of him. Foakes, who I have the pleasure of working with at Surrey, is a genuine all-rounder in the modern game and I hope his artistry with the gloves along with his talent with bat in hand will be seen on the international stage for a long time.

And that, I guess, as this book shows, is the goal for all aspiring wicketkeepers of today – master the art of keeping wicket and make sure you can bat too.

Alec Stewart
Surrey & England



INTRODUCTION

The wicketkeeper is central to any cricket team and is a very exciting role for any player to have. You are constantly in the game and vital to the team, whether it is initiating catches and stumpings, changing the course of the game with a special dismissal, energising the team, advising the captain and bowler, limiting extras, tidying up poor throws, or offering words of encouragement to your team-mates. Moreover, you are possibly batting in the top order and scoring vital runs.

This book is aimed at all wicketkeepers, wherever you are on your wicketkeeping journey, be that a beginner or a seasoned professional. If you are thinking about trying wicketkeeping for the first time, then please consider these words from Ben Duckett (Nottinghamshire & England):

I think it's so important at a young age to give everything a go because you never know how good you will be. Wicketkeeping is a great chance to get involved in the game if you're not a bowler. Therefore, it takes the pressure off your batting, as you can contribute whilst keeping too.

This book is also for all cricket coaches, whether they have personal wicketkeeping experience or not. It gives comprehensive guidance on the technical, tactical, physical, mental, lifestyle and training elements of wicketkeeping. Many cricket coaches who do not have experience of keeping themselves may be lacking in confidence, so are reluctant to tackle this discipline in any depth. However, there are many similar fundamental principles that are transferable from batting:

- A solid base in set-up to achieve a balanced position
- A still head position as the bowler releases the ball and as the batter executes their shot
- Watching the ball
- Decision-making
- Quick movement whilst still tracking the ball
- A need to let the ball come (in most cases), and the timing of the taking of the ball, as opposed to hitting it
- A relaxed body and an alert mind
- The ability to concentrate for long periods of time

These principles are detailed throughout the book, aiming to give the coach the confidence to drive forward with their wicketkeeping coaching.

As with any aspect of cricket there are several ways of achieving the same thing, and there are so many different styles out there. We will provide various options on how to set up, how to take the ball, diving techniques, leg-side takes, etc. Look at any of the current international cricketers out there and no two are the same. Hopefully, from the various methods suggested, you will find what works for you. Ultimately, you need to understand your own game and play to your strengths.

As coaches we also need to thoroughly know the players we work with and be open-minded enough to come out of our comfort zones and try new things. What may work for one player may not necessarily work for another. We hope this book gets you thinking confidently enough to adapt and add to its content, specifically for the individual keepers you work with. There are many contributions from current players and coaches, as well as former greats dotted throughout this book, and there is a comprehensive drills section in [Chapter 9](#), which will help to keep training fun and varied.

Ultimately, we hope everyone who reads this book will be enlightened and inspired by it, arousing a curiosity for the beautiful and extremely enjoyable art of wicketkeeping.

Note for players and coaches

Remember, whatever level you are currently playing or coaching, you can always learn something new. Learn from watching videos of the best players, learn from the players and coaches you play with and against, and always strive to be better tomorrow than you are today.

Throughout this book, all technical descriptions and drill references are for keeping wicket to a right-hand batter unless stated otherwise.



ONE THE BASICS

The key basics for wicketkeepers are to stay relaxed and watch the ball. Try and get your head in line with the ball whenever possible. The closer your head is to your hands in general, the more chance you have of catching the ball.

PETER MOORES

Nottinghamshire Head Coach and former England Head Coach

We did not like calling this chapter ‘The Basics’, as it implies easy or simple. However, as with any other discipline within the game, it is the basics that need to be mastered first before progressing further. Consistent success is usually achieved by the basics being executed really well over a long period of time. There is little point in pulling off a blinding one-handed catch, only to drop two that come straight at you, or letting several byes through. It is essential that you are proficient at the basics.

So, we have established that there are many principles for wicketkeeping that are similar to those for batting. The one we are going to explore first is the need for a solid base.

Footwork and balance are the most important aspects of wicketkeeping stood back to the fast bowlers. You need to get your head into line with the ball, and balance is key to be able to move quickly from side to side.

DAVID RIPLEY

Northamptonshire Head Coach & London Spirit Assistant Coach

Set-up and achieving a solid base

As with batting, a solid base is so important for two main reasons: it provides a still head position (which is crucial as the bowler releases the ball), and a powerful position from which to move quickly. As the bowler lets go of the ball, a wicketkeeper needs to be still. What you do prior to this is not that important. Some wicketkeepers have a trigger movement, others do not (more on that later). As long as you are still upon the bowler's ball release, you will be in a strong position that enables quick movement.

Wicketkeepers always used to be encouraged to adopt the following stance as the bowler ran in:



However, this position is not a good one to move quickly from. A much more dynamic position is this:



We will call this the ‘ready’ or ‘set’ position. Legs are wider than shoulder-width apart and the knees are bent, weight is predominantly on the balls of the feet and equally loaded on each leg. This is sometimes called the ‘Z’ position, a term that has been used for the correlation of the lower leg, upper leg and back orientation. It ensures a posture that provides stability, power, control and good head position.

The important thing here is to have a good ‘power’ position, with the knees bent and the back straight. This puts the keeper in a position where they can move powerfully from the stance, whilst ensuring they are protecting their back from strain and injury. A good way of remembering this shape is to think ‘chin up, backside out’. Importantly, the head is still and the eyes level. The player looks comfortable and in a position to move quickly. Take a look at Jos Buttler’s ready position on delivery for a good example.

This is why most modern keepers do not go down into the traditional stance when they are stood back to the faster bowlers – because they only have to get up again before the bowler delivers the ball. Stances do vary from standing up to the wicket to standing back, and these are discussed in more detail in later chapters.

In terms of hand position, at this point it is really down to personal preference. Some wicketkeepers will have their hands together, others apart.

Note for coaches

If a player has had an issue with not getting their hands together in time to take the ball, then together in the ready position probably serves best. However, hands apart can allow a more naturally dynamic position to move quickly, especially if there is a necessity to dive. If apart, it is important that both hands are in a similar position to help maintain balance and even weight distribution on each leg. Keepers should not load weight on one side or the other, as this will adversely affect their ability to move in the desired direction. Again, this is similar to batting. Batters that load too much on their front or back foot will improve moving in one direction but will find it detrimental when needing to move on to the opposite foot.

Trigger movements or pre-delivery movements

At this point we should give some detail on trigger movements. As with batting, players can find these very useful as part of their pre-delivery routine. Similar to batters, wicketkeepers can find this beneficial for getting the feet moving and attaining the ready position for each delivery, whatever comes down, whether the ball is edged, missed, left or hit by the batter. Some wicketkeepers do stand very still – simply in a good ready position – but most need a pre-delivery routine to feel ready to move. It can also form part of the switching-on routine ‘mentally’ for each delivery, ensuring the player is ready for action. We discuss mental alertness and concentration in more depth in [Chapter 6](#).

Pre-delivery movements can take many forms. If you are a proponent of the traditional stance, then your trigger will simply be standing up and planting your feet into the ready position. Others like to walk in with the

bowler as they near the end of their run-up, similar to a fielder, and then adopt the ready position. This can be by stepping into that position or jumping in. Whatever your preference, it has to be the same and your weight needs to be evenly distributed on each leg.

Similar to batting, the crucial elements of a trigger movement are the timing of them to achieve a still, solid base as the bowler releases the ball, and that they are well ingrained and consistently repeatable for every delivery. Once a favoured routine is established, it is important to practise it so it becomes second nature and is exactly the same for each delivery. Your pre-delivery movement will almost certainly differ whether you are stood up to the wicket or stood back. Stood up, coming up with the ball is vital, but is not as important when stood back, where the ability to be able to cover larger distances is required more often.

Trigger movements are discussed in more detail in the chapters specifically discussing standing back or standing up to the wicket. Do have a look at Jos Buttler keeping wicket to see a good example of a simple and controlled trigger movement from a traditional stance.

Note for coaches

Where possible, film your wicketkeepers in action, both in training and matches. This is a powerful tool to not only highlight areas of improvement, but as an important record of the times when your wicketkeeper played well, so you can refer back to this footage if there is a period when they are not performing as well. At these times it often goes right back to the basics. A really good phone app is Cricket Coach Plus HD, which allows good slow-motion and frame-by-frame replays.

Watching the ball

Hand-eye co-ordination is everything, so practise catching until it becomes second nature.

JACK RUSSELL

Gloucestershire & England

Again similar to batting, watching the ball is a crucial aspect of catching the ball cleanly on a consistent basis. If a solid base has been achieved, your head will be still and eyes level, giving you the best chance of picking up the ball early, enabling you to determine length and line, and any movement likely in the air. The earlier you can ascertain this information, the quicker you will move into a position to take the ball should it come through to you. If you are only picking up the ball halfway down its flight, your reaction and subsequent movements will be slower than if you pick it up as it leaves the bowler's hand.

You will also find it useful if you can start tracking the ball in the hand like a batter would, identifying different grips for variations and changes of pace. Keeping wicket to the same bowler regularly will enable you to develop a knowledge of what they are about to bowl before they deliver the ball, and perhaps even whilst they are still running in!

Next time you are keeping to a bowler, as they run in, see if you can spot on which side they are presenting the shiny side of the ball and the angle of the seam.

One question asked regularly is whether a wicketkeeper should watch the ball all the way into the gloves. This largely depends on where the player's starting point for taking a catch is. Someone like Jos Buttler likes to take the ball in front of his body, then step to the side to take to the left side of his body. His head tracks the ball all the way.



If a wicketkeeper prefers to catch the ball closer to their body and 'give' into their body, it is harder to track the ball with the eyes all the way in, as

to do so the body will need to ‘slump’ so the head moves over the ball. Here it is advisable for a keeper to keep their head up and watch the ball as far as they can into the gloves. Sarfaraz Ahmed is a good example of someone who takes the ball this way.

If a ball swings after pitching or starts to ‘wobble’ in multiple directions, laterally and vertically, then attempting to watch the ball all the way into the gloves is crucial. Where it is physically possible to do so, the keeper should stay in line with the ball and give to the body.

Stood up to the wicket, we always encourage a wicketkeeper to watch the ball into the gloves, as so many stumpings are missed when a player prematurely attempts the stumping before taking the ball, being visually distracted by the position of the stumps or the location of the batter’s feet. Drilling yourself to watch the ball all the way into your hands will make sure it is cleanly taken before going for the stumps. Remember to want and expect to take every single ball bowled and every single ball thrown in from the outfield.

In the next three chapters we discuss in more detail the various methods of taking the ball stood back and stood up to the wicket, and there is a comprehensive set of drills in [Chapter 9](#) that can improve hand-eye co-ordination and your ability to track the ball.

Catching the ball

The most important basic to nail down on wicketkeeping is catching the ball. You need to present a big catching area, with thumbs out, elbows in and presenting the palms not the fingers to the ball. If you’re not catching many balls, you’re not going to enjoy it!

DAVID RIPLEY

Ultimately, the role of the wicketkeeper is to catch the ball repeatedly, and if you can do this consistently, you cannot ask any more of yourself. A strong ready position base will help your head position and your ability to watch and track the ball into the gloves. A good catching technique and