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BEN CODDINGTON, WIMBLEDON CC AND LINCOLNSHIRE

BATTING

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

FOREWORD BY ADAM HOLLIOAKE



**JAMES KNOTT
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‘This book is fantastic. It is insightful and detailed, I thoroughly enjoyed the holistic structure, weighted heavily towards tactics and the mental approach, still with accurate and simplified technical input’

SAM ARTHURS, FOUNDATION PATHWAY MANAGER, OXFORDSHIRE CRICKET

‘This book offers a complete guide to batting, explained in a way that is thoroughly engaging and intelligible to all audiences. Whether you’re a player looking to advance your own batting, a parent or a coach looking to improve others, you will find everything you need in this book to develop the next great modern-day batter’

LUKE SHARPLES, TALENT PATHWAY PERFORMANCE MANAGER,
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

‘As technical batting coaching appears to be enjoying a renaissance following the recent fortunes of the England Test side, this book provides an accessible and comprehensive guide. The way technical and tactical aspects of batting are described makes it accessible for players of all abilities, and the drills are practical and applicable. This book is a must for all young players and coaches with a desire to understand and improve their game’

MIKE SUTLIFF, DINTON CC AND FORMER PROFESSIONAL CRICKETER WITH
LEICESTERSHIRE & GLOUCESTERSHIRE

‘In touch and up to date whilst still incorporating the sound principles of batting that have lasted the test of time, this comprehensive guide is of great use to players, coaches and parents alike looking to aid the development of modern batsmanship to meet the demands of the modern game’

BEN CODDINGTON, WIMBLEDON CC AND LINCOLNSHIRE

‘This is a very detailed book on batting, yet still an accessible read for players and coaches of all levels. The technical, tactical, mental and physical aspects of

batting are all covered and there is a huge drills section for coaches to dip into.

DAVID RIPLEY, FORMER NORTHANTS HEAD COACH AND LONDON SPIRIT ASSISTANT
COACH

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ADAM HOLLIOAKE

*With contributions from
Sir Geoffrey Boycott, Ben Duckett, Julian Wood,
Graham Gooch & Mark Butcher*

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FOREWORD

There is something unique about the art of batting that separates it from most sports. Like the knock-out in boxing, the batsman losing his wicket signals the end of his game. It's final, brutal and beautiful at the same time.

There would be very little that would get any person to watch a game that lasts for five days (or even one day for that matter) without these little battles, these tiny victories and failures within the grand scheme of the war. It would be hard to keep people's attention for the length of time that it takes to complete any game of cricket without that massive moment of celebration for the bowler and huge disappointment for the outgoing batsman, his teammates and supporters.

I first became a professional cricketer back in 1989 and have been fortunate to stay in the game for the last 30-odd years. During that time, I have seen so many advancements, fitness fads, nuances and biomechanical changes in batting techniques to acknowledge that I will probably never know what the perfect way to bat is, as there will always be new techniques that improve the batsman's chances of scoring runs. Every time I think I have the complexities of the game covered, someone comes along and masters a new technique. At the time of writing, the off-stump guard is high on the list of debates (certainly between the players that played in my generation and the players of the current generation). One thing that I do know is that whichever technique a batsman chooses, it's important that the batsman commits to that technique and, even more importantly, does it well.

I have seen players like Shivnarine Chanderpaul average 50 in over 100-plus Test matches. When first looking at his technique you'd think he was destined for failure. If you saw a youngster batting with the same technique, there would be a lot of coaches who would tell him he could never be successful batting that way. For all the biomechanical flaws that Chanderpaul appeared to have, he made up for it with two of the more important things a batsman can possess: the ability to play the ball very late and an amazing appetite for runs born from impeccable concentration.

On the topic of concentration, I have been fascinated by the change in mindset of batsmen in the modern era. Their ability to concentrate has been elevated by a greater understanding of psychology and the use of sports psychologists who have now made terms like emotion control, pre-ball routines and arousal levels part of common dressing-room talk (within the professional game at least).

When I was a player, I would've called myself very strong-minded (I've never been one for modesty), but most of my coaches would say I was just stubborn and very hard to coach. I listened to the coaches but didn't always take everything they said as gospel; I'm not sure if this is from a) arrogance, b) ignorance, c) mistrust, d) the fact I felt I could add to things that the coaches were telling me. This last point has fascinated me in recent times. When I first started as a coach, my ego often made it hard for me to accept when a player questioned the things I would suggest to him/her. I felt that any player that didn't listen to what I had to say was 'difficult to coach and was not going to reach their potential'. I now recognise that once a batsman is at the professional stage of their career, working out new techniques is important – indeed necessary – for their game to improve. When I look back at the footage of me playing in the late 90s (bearing in mind I was probably one of the more forward-thinking cricketers at the time), I look at the naivety of my technique and feel that had I known then what I've since learned as a coach, I would have been a far better player (if I had adopted the modern techniques).

It is a new thing for me to be able to let go of the fact that modern players are superior to those of the past. It would be naïve to think otherwise. People are running faster, jumping further, have greater technology. Almost every

world record has improved in every sport; it would be foolish to think that batting was the only sport/activity that has gone backwards.

With that in mind, I feel coaches need to move forward from the old-school 'tell someone how it's done' mindset and need to move towards a more collaborative approach with the player. It goes without saying that this doesn't apply to youngsters starting the game. Learning a basic and sound technique is vital. The finer nuances of the game can be developed once the player is at the professional level.

One thing that I feel remains contentious and is debated long and hard between the modern player and the more traditionalist player, is the amount of pressure a batsman applies to the bowlers. I know that it will always be the way that ex-players feel that current players aren't patient enough or prepared to wait for scoring opportunities. This argument has no finish line and will never be resolved; however, I am of the firm belief that a batsman must (by the nature of his body language and intent) make the bowler aware that if he delivers the ball into certain areas of the pitch he is going to get punished. It is this very intent that creates pressure on bowlers, and bowlers who are running up to bowl that are under pressure are far more likely to bowl a loose delivery than the one who runs in to bowl knowing that a batsman is only looking to survive.

So with this in mind I believe that batsmen need to apply pressure to bowlers; the amount of pressure is the very art of batting and if everyone had the answer to that then there would be very little need for James Knott's and Andy O'Connor's very enlightening book.



Adam Hoolioake Surrey & England

INTRODUCTION

With the variety of formats around in the modern game, cricket players and coaches need to be more flexible in their approach than ever before, developing a diverse set of skills in addition to tactical awareness. Every player will have a 'natural' game and style, but it is important now to have a variety of games to suit each format and match scenario. With practice, it is possible to develop numerous 'natural' games and different ways of playing. Ben Stokes is a great example of this. In Test cricket he can go from first to top gear very quickly, and at the appropriate time.

There are also many different styles of batting out there. No two batters are identical, and their individual style of batting will have developed through experience, watching other players and through any coaching influences they have had, whether this be from family or formal coaching. It is important to have an understanding of these to develop an all-round game, but ultimately a batter needs to know their own game and figure out what works for them. The greater this awareness, the greater the results will be on the pitch in terms of run scoring.

'As a player you need to realise you are your own best coach. You are responsible for your performance and your development. A coach can give you ideas and direction, but you need to select the right things that work for you and are suitable for you.'

GRAHAM GOOCH

Essex & England, & former England batting coach

This book highlights and provides options on the basic fundamentals that are required for batting and run scoring, along with a breakdown of the technical and tactical aspects of each shot, coupled with the mental and physical demands of batting. Throughout this book there are many contributions from some of the game's best players and coaches, both past and present. For coaches there is a comprehensive drills chapter, with over 80 drills and practices that will help develop your player's game and keep training sessions engaging and varied. Whatever level you are currently playing or coaching at there will be something in this book for you.

Note for players and coaches

Ensure you practise thoroughly before taking any new or revised changes into a game, so that it already feels natural, thereby allowing you to concentrate on just watching the ball. So select the relevant elements that work for you. Ultimately, you need to be responsible for your own development.

Throughout this book, all technical descriptions and drill references are detailed for a right-hand batter facing a right-arm bowler, bowling over the wicket, unless stated otherwise.



ONE

THE BASICS

‘The key basics to nail down are keeping your head still, playing the ball as late as possible and then practising the shots you want to perform in games over and over again.’

BEN DUCKETT

Nottinghamshire & England

It is so important for you as a batter to have a firm technical foundation and knowledge of the basics of batting early in your development, so that should you experience a slump of form and lack of runs, you always have a reference point to return back to. The more these basics are practised and repeated, eventually becoming natural and consistent, the greater success you will have out in the middle. Usually when a dip in form occurs it is a basic fundamental that is failing, so you need to go ‘back to basics’.

Note for coaches

When a player is playing well and scoring runs consistently, record video footage of this for you both to refer back to if they lose form. You will then be able to highlight any differences in their game and start making the interventions to get back to their ‘best’ game.

'The grip, stance and backlift are the three main building blocks of a solid technique.'

MARK BUTCHER

Surrey & England

Grip

The most important aspect of gripping the bat is that your hands work together and not detrimentally oppose each other. This can potentially be a problem if the hands are too far apart on the bat handle. When working together they allow your bat to come down in a straight line, thus producing a natural flow and follow-through.



To achieve this natural flow with the hands working together, it is advised that the V shapes made by your thumb and first finger of both hands are aligned together on the bat handle as in the photo above. A good starting point is to line these Vs up down the back of the bat between the outside edge and the splice of the bat. If arranged in this manner they produce a straight line down

the back of the bat. This is a good starting point for your grip, as it enables you to access both sides of the wicket more easily and contributes to you having a greater array of shots. Some of the world's best players such as Joe Root, Kane Williamson and Virat Kohli grip the bat this way.

However, there are many batters out there who line their Vs up differently to this. Remember that while this is the preferred method, some unorthodox grips work perfectly for the individual using them. It is an individual preference and should only be changed if it can be proven to be a flaw in technique, ultimately holding back a batter's development. Try an experiment. Move your Vs so they align with the middle of the bat – straight down the splice. If you take the bat back, what do you notice about the bat face? Which side of the ground will this grip assist with accessing? Which attacking shots will it help with?

The answer is the leg side, as the bat face is now more closed. With the Vs in this position, the grip can help keep the ball down when sweeping, cutting, hooking and pulling. It can also help with getting the hands high when defending. The former South African captain and now director of South African cricket, Graeme Smith, is a good example of a player who had a 'closed grip' and would often hit balls from outside off stump through the leg side.

Conversely, if the Vs are lined up more towards the outside edge of the bat, this will aid off-side play as the bat face will now be more 'open'. Former England captain and now Sky Sports commentator Nasser Hussain is a good example of a batter with a more open grip, and as a result was a good square driver.

Note for coaches

If you find a player whose grip is slightly off-side or leg-side dominant, but they are still able to access both sides of the ground scoring effectively, think hard before intervening. If this grip feels natural to the player and is effective, is there a need for a change?

Most batters will have their hands together on the bat handle, nearer the top than the bottom if the size of the bat is correct. However, some players feel they have more control of the bat if they grip it nearer where the bat handle joins the bat, and others more leverage and therefore power if they grip it near the end of the handle. As you get more experienced you may subtly move your hands lower or higher on the handle if you have premeditated a certain shot. There are even some players who have their hands slightly apart on the handle, the South African batsman Faf du Plessis being an example of such a player.

It is important not to grip the bat too tightly in your set-up if you want to achieve a natural bat flow. If you grip the bat too tightly, and your hands and arms are very tense, this can inhibit your bat swing. Having a lighter, softer grip will make it easier to produce your swing if your bat is the right weight and not too heavy. This is known as having ‘a good pick-up’. You only need to grip the bat handle tightly as the bat hits the ball to ensure that the bat face does not move much on contact and you get full power into the shot.

A relaxed grip will also help you make any late adjustments to the shot you have decided to play, and if you are defending, enable you to achieve ‘soft hands’, where there is some give in the bat as the ball strikes it. This can help get the ball straight to ground or prevent a catch carrying to the wicketkeeper, slip or close-in fielder.

Stance

‘All great players and have great footwork and balance.’

SIR GEOFFREY BOYCOTT

Yorkshire & England

The most important feature of your stance is that it feels comfortable and that you can move quickly from it, whether you have a trigger movement (also called a pre-delivery movement) or not. Trigger movements are discussed later in this chapter. A solid, balanced base, enabling your head and eyes to remain

level and still as the bowler runs in, will enhance your ability to watch the ball closely as it is released.

A good starting point is to have your feet approximately shoulder-width apart, with the crease line in the middle of your feet. This ensures that your back foot will be in the crease if the keeper is stood up, thus negating any possibility of being stumped. It also provides some free distance to step safely back towards the stumps for back-foot shots. Of course, there are variations to this, and often tactical decisions may govern where the batter takes their stance. On a low-bouncing wicket, against a medium-pacer with the wicketkeeper stood back, the batter may decide to set up outside the crease, down the pitch towards the bowler to help negate lbw. If facing a very quick bowler, some stand with both feet inside the crease to give themselves more time to see, react to and play the ball.

As with grips, many batters stand differently as the bowler runs in. Some may trigger a lot, some trigger a little, and others not at all. In terms of being balanced and still with a good head position, nearly all players have their knees slightly bent in their stance, with their weight slightly on their heels, not totally on the balls of their feet. The bending of the knees puts the batter into a powerful position for movement, potentially forwards or backwards. Very much like a grasshopper ready to leap, by bending the knees slightly the batter stores up potential energy, then releases this in the movement process. If the batter's legs are stiff, straight and upright, it is very difficult to move quickly from this position. Conversely, if the knees are bent excessively, this too can hinder quick movement and can lead to coming up on contact with the ball as it is hard to maintain that very low position.

It must be remembered that the weight will be moved into the balls of the feet as the movement decision is initiated. The toes/ball of the back foot will push the batter on to the front foot, and the toes/ball of the front foot will push the batter on to the back foot.

Ben Duckett's youth cricket saw him play as a batsman/wicketkeeper for Northamptonshire CCC and Stowe School. After signing professionally Ben kept wicket less regularly and began to focus more on his batting. He had incredible success early in his career with 2016 being his best season to date. That year he scored over 1,300 first-class runs and won the T20 Blast with Northants. This led to him being named as the young cricketer of the year by both the Cricket Writers' Club and the Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA). He was also named PCA Player of the Year – the first player to win both PCA awards in the same season. To date Ben has played four Test matches, three ODIs and one T20i for England, as well as franchise T20 cricket around the world.

SIR GEOFFREY BOYCOTT

Sir Geoffrey is one of England's most successful batsmen of all time. In a career spanning 24 years for Yorkshire and England he scored 151 centuries in first-class cricket. He famously scored his 100th against Australia at his home ground of Headingley. In total he scored over 8,000 runs in Test matches at an average of 47.72. Upon retiring Sir Geoffrey has had many coaching roles and has built a successful career as a commentator.

JULIAN WOOD

Julian played first-class cricket for Hampshire in the late 80s and early 90s before having a long stint in Minor Counties cricket for Berkshire. He is now the cricket professional at Bradfield College. He specialises in coaching power hitting and has had stints working globally with the world's best players with various T20 franchises. Julian also runs his own coaching business: The Julian Wood Cricket Academy (jwcricketacademy.com).

MARK BUTCHER

Mark played 71 Test matches for England, mainly as an opening left-handed batsman. He played county cricket for Surrey from 1992 until his retirement in 2009 and scored over 17,000 first-class runs. Mark is now a commentator and musician.

JAMES CRONIE

James is a batsman/off-spinner on the Northants Academy and has played in their 2nd XI. James finished A-levels at Stowe School in 2021 and is now studying financial mathematics at Loughborough University. He has represented the Midlands at both the ECB Bunbury Festival and the Super 4s, as well as training with England U19s.

AADI SHARMA

Aadi is currently doing his GCSEs at Stowe School and is on the Northants Academy, having come through the Bucks pathway. He was the leading run scorer for the South & West at the ECB Bunbury Festival in 2021.

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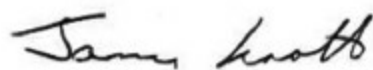
We would also like to thank all of those who have helped us on our cricketing journey throughout the years that led us to this point: our families, our friends, our team-mates, our co-workers, other teachers and other coaches.

They have all inspired, encouraged, challenged and shared their knowledge and experiences with us over many years, and without all of that accumulated knowledge, this book would never have been written.

Lastly, a huge thank you to you the reader for buying this book. We very much hope you enjoy it and, whether a player or coach, that it helps you on your own cricketing journey.



Andrew O'Connor



James Knott

