

Recommended ECBACO Practice - Safe and Best Positioning for Umpires

UMPIRE AT THE BOWLER'S END

There is little doubt that the pace of the game at all levels has increased. This has been prompted by the widespread acceptance of the shorter form of the game focusing the minds of cricketers on higher run-rates and playing more attacking strokes. Add to this the improvements in equipment used and facilities available, and there is little doubt the game has developed.

With this development has come a renewed expectation that the umpires will continue to be able to effectively play out their role and, in particular, continue to move to the best possible positions at all times to adjudicate on decisions that need to be made. The tragic death of Alwyn Jenkins during a League match in 2009 acts as a reminder as to how vulnerable we can be, and all umpires need to be aware of their own safety as well as that of the players.

This short article is focusing only on the umpire at the bowler's end moving into a position to adjudicate a run-out at his end. The first thing to establish is that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' side for the bowler's end umpire to move to in relation to where the ball has been played or deflected. There are however 'good' and 'better' positions to get into when moving into position to adjudicate on run-outs.

At the time that a run is taken there can be no time for a considered movement, and effective umpires train themselves to respond instantly. An appropriate amount of practice in a safe environment is recommended to allow your responses to become more or less automatic.

The established thinking of moving to the side of the direction of the ball on many occasions will be the better position. But, what when the ball has been struck to mid-on/mid-off - the 'V' area of the field? The challenge is to identify a trigger to allow you to move instantly to the other side at these important times. There are no second chances and your first movement is the only chance you have to achieve the best position.

At all levels of cricket there is potential for serious injury, and in order to reduce the chance of this, your positioning needs to be fully thought through in a prepared and effective strategy.

The priorities for the umpire at the bowler's end when moving into position to adjudicate a run-out are as follows:-

- 1. Watch the ball**
- 2. Move to level with the Popping Crease**
- 3. Depth to provide a clearer view of the whole event**
- 4. Be still with your head level at the instant of an appeal [when decision has to be made]**

The first priority never changes and is the key to enabling you to be able to react quickly and in the best way when moving from the bowler's end wicket.

If the ball is struck to mid-on/mid-off and you physically turn to watch the ball, make sure that you rotate your hips in doing so. Then there is only one way that your body will be able to move sharply. The direction is backwards and, hopefully, takes you away from the likely trajectory of any attempt to throw the ball either at the wicket or to a fielder at your end.

As soon as you are alert to the need to move, this action will take you to the best position immediately.

UMPIRE AT THE STRIKER'S END

Umpires while standing at the striker's end are able to read the game from a completely different perspective from the intensity and scrutiny required when at the bowler's end. Nevertheless there is as much scope for danger while standing at this end and as much to be vigilant for in order to be proficient and safe. The skill of the effective umpire is the ability to be able to be looking at the right thing at the right time and accept that one is not able to look at everything all of the time.

Much is discussed about whether the striker's end umpire is better standing on the leg or off side, especially when faced with a combination of right and left handed batsmen. Those who are convinced that there is always a need for the umpire to be standing on the leg side of the striker should just consider whether, at times, it may be better to consider the alternative depending on the fielders' positions and your own viewing priorities.

In matches where there are tight over rates and fielding restrictions in place are such cases when it might be preferential to remain on one side or the other for the duration of the innings. However, this is something for individuals to consider and they should not feel that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' side. As mentioned in the positioning at the bowler's end, there are good positions and better positions and the important thing is to have your reasons for the side you choose rather than just going where convention takes you. Whatever you decide, it is imperative that the captain of the fielding side is kept informed of your intentions.

In addition to the vast array of areas to be observed while positioned at the striker's end, the most important time in the game for you is whenever runs are scored. The ability to keep your eye on the ball will always enable you to focus on the action while at the same time keeping you safe from the unexpected wayward throw from a fielder. This has to be combined with appropriate glances as each batsman makes his ground at the striker's end, as well as a continued awareness of where the fielding players are.

Some umpires find it effective to physically turn so that they are standing more sideways on once the ball is hit, thereby keeping the ball in view for the vast majority of the time. This provides the umpire with a good view of the batsmen running and at same time, the ability to scrutinise the actions of the fielders and to offer any help required to their colleague as necessary. Most importantly, however, if you are watching the ball you will be able to keep yourself safe from being struck by the ball which has to be the highest priority of all.

The umpires need to be constantly aware of the changing environment around them. The most effective umpires:-

- 1. Watch the ball at every opportunity**
- 2. Move efficiently and effectively**
- 3. React positively to the play as it unfolds and be one step ahead**
- 4. Remain in control of their movements**

The priorities for the umpire at the striker's end when runs are being scored or when the ball is struck behind him, are as follows:-

- 1. Watch the ball with glances to maintain awareness of the batsmen's movements.**
- 2. If necessary turn your body to optimise your views and maintain awareness of the batsmen's positions.**
- 3. Be still with your head level at the instant of an appeal [when decision has to be made] and in line with the popping crease.**