

PREPARING TO BAT

How rightly someone has said that by failing to prepare you are preparing to fail. There is definitely a grain of truth in that. All good batsmen develop a consistent pre-match and pre-batting routine which helps them to get into the right frame of mind, thus enhancing their chances of success. Nerves are really caused by fear of failure and can be eliminated if a batsman has confidence in his own ability to cope with whatever is bowled at him. Such confidence will come if you know you have prepared in the best possible way for the innings ahead.

The following things will help ensure the right preparation for an innings:

■ *To bat long and score runs is the essence of batting.* You have to practice, practice and practice to improve your technique, advance your skills and develop your concentration. Bear in mind that all batting practice should be serious and treated as importantly as if one is playing in a match. In 'nets' you have to simulate the match conditions for it to be of real value. The greatest virtue of Sir Donald Bradman was that he could play in a match as if he was playing in the 'nets'.

■ On the match day you should get to the ground early so that you can do the warm-up properly and prepare yourself physically as well as mentally. You should also do the knocking or take a session at 'nets' if possible as this is a specific way which prepares you for your innings in the middle. If you need to practice against a particular type of bowler then get organized well in advance. It also helps you to forget about the game itself and all the nervous tension associated with it. It builds your self-confidence as you get your feet moving forward and backward, according to the line and length of the ball and find the timing of strokes to your satisfaction.

■ Be prepared well in advance so that you don't have to rush and

become panicky. Make sure your clothing and equipment are well adjusted. Your leg guard straps properly fastened, thigh pad, abdominal guard comfortable and well adjusted. Put your bat, gloves and helmet in an easily accessible place. Now settle back and watch play. Only the next two batsmen should be padded up.

■ When about to go in to sit in the same type of light in which you are going to bat. The glare in the middle can be difficult to deal with if you have been sitting in the shade of the pavilion.

■ Do not play every ball bowled in your mind while waiting to bat. If you do so it will be as if you are actually batting and by the time your turn comes to play your innings in the middle, you would have used up all your valuable energy and your eyes and mind will also be tired and will get your innings off to a bad start. You will also be too tired to play a long innings any way. You can relax by walking around and stretching a bit.

■ Try to observe and absorb the vital information regarding the bowler by sitting behind the bowler's arm to see which is his stock delivery and the variation in his bowling which he uses to deceive the batsmen. The standard of fielders, for instance who is left or right hander, who is a fast mover with a powerful throw, the weak fielder, the pitch conditions and the pace of outfield etc. This can be extremely useful information for you when you go in as it helps you to decide on your plan of action.

■ Every batsman worth his salt feels slightly nervous before he goes into bat. Actually it is a feeling of responsibility which contains within the enthusiasm and anxiety to do well. But being extremely affected can be harmful and can spoil your game. You can combat this by building your confidence by thinking of all the good strokes you have played in the 'nets' and how have been middling the ball or recalling your recent performances in which you have done really well as it would help you to be in your ideal performance state zone. You may also follow a ritual if it works for you.

■ There should be no distraction by friends or acquaintances (including girl friends) who are not involved in the game. You should be in a relaxed frame of mind, share a joke, be light hearted but please

try to avoid tension at all times, thus conserving your energy which is so vital for playing a long innings.

■ When your turn comes to go in you should approach the wickets in a confident manner as if you own the place. Take time to adjust your eyes to the light. The law on timed out states that the incoming batsman should be ready to receive the ball or if he is at the bowler's end, should be in a position for his partner to receive the delivery within three minutes. This time is counted from the time the previous batsman is dismissed or retired. Aim to arrive at the crease in a calm, positive and organized frame of mind. While on your way out to the wicket, look far and near, far and near. Some batsmen also roll the eye balls when about to go in. Once you have arrived at the crease, take some time to stare at the stumps at the other end because this is the distance from which the ball will be delivered. It is a useful exercise to adjust eyes to enable a batsman to see the ball early.

■ You should consciously stop worrying about the things you cannot control, like the pitch conditions, sledging by the fielder, umpiring decisions, hostile crowd etc, and start thinking positively about the things you can control. ***Remember to control the controllable. For example, playing one ball at a time.***