

# GOLDEN RULES OF BATTING

■ **WATCHING THE BALL CLOSELY IS OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE IN BATTING.** Though it may sound a very elementary and logical thing, yet believe me, it is easier said than done. A batsman must watch the ball like a hawk with intense concentration from the time it leaves the bowler's hand, comes off the pitch, onto the face of the bat. In other words, watch the ball through and through. Keeping your head absolutely still is an invaluable aid in doing so. Even the best technique in the world will fail if the brain does not get the fullest and latest information about delivery and watching the ball on to the bat gives it to you. *It is the greatest virtue a batsman can develop.*

■ **ALWAYS MAKE UP YOUR MIND REGARDING YOUR RESPONSE OR CHOICE OF STROKE TO A DELIVERY AFTER THE BALL HAS BEEN RELEASED FROM THE BOWLER'S HAND.** You must wait until the ball has left the bowler's hand before deciding which stroke to play, otherwise you might as well do the whole thing by numbers. After all, how can you judge the line and length and speed of a delivery until it is released from the bowler's hand. Let your eyes be your guide, depend solely on them, they will seldom let you down. *“Play the ball as you see it to be and not as you think it to be,” said C. B. Fry in his classic coaching book ‘Batsmanship.’* Remember, batting is always a response or reaction to the ball that has been bowled, which may be called the stimulus.

■ **PLAY ACCORDING TO THE LENGTH OF THE BALL.** Playing according to the length of the ball is of paramount importance. This single attribute is what sets the great batsmen apart from the rest. They seldom play forward when they should be back or play back when they should be forward. To be able to play decisively depends on the accurate and quick judgment of the length of the ball. You should watch the ball with intense concentration right



out of the bowler's hand so that you can judge the line and length of the ball as soon as the ball leaves the bowler's hand.

It is often seen that some batsmen watch the general area from where the ball will be released and as a result take a yard or two extra to pick up the ball this causes them to have less time to judge the length of the ball with the result they make an indecisive movement rather than being right forward or right back. Only regular and dedicated practice can improve this aspect.

The famous Australian coach, Bob Simpson, advises that this practice to judge the length of the ball should be done from twenty two yards which is the actual length of the pitch.

■ **NEVER TRY TO HIT THE BALL TOO HARD.** I have seen many batsmen trying to hit too hard with poor results. In trying to hit too hard you tend to lose your body balance and since the head also swerves with the movement, it impairs the sighting of the ball.

Learn to time your shots properly as it is the secret behind the powerful strokes. The placing and pacing of the stroke by varying the weight behind the stroke will enable you to score more rapidly. Sachin Tendulkar is the best example of powerful strokes mainly due to sheer sense of timing rather than brute force. He achieves this by maximum acceleration of the bat speed in the impact zone.

■ **FIRST HIT AND THEN LOOK IN THE DIRECTION OF THE STROKE.** A loose delivery (a juicy half volley or a long hop) gives a batsman a mouth watering feeling causing him to look up before the point of impact. To check this suicidal tendency a batsman should watch the impact area a split second after contact between the bat and the ball. *A batsman should concentrate even while executing the shot.* Rahul Dravid, technically one of the most sound batsmen in the world, can be seen following this important point.

■ **ALWAYS PLAY CLOSE TO YOUR BODY.** This is the hallmark of all great batsmen that they allow the ball to come close to the body so that a firm, positive and controlled stroke can be played. It also enables a batsman to keep a straight bat because the further the bat is from the body, more difficult it is to keep it in perpendicular position.



Next time you see a batsman playing the ball on to his stumps, see how far the bat was from his body and you would clearly understand what I meant.

■ **LET THE TOP HAND BE IN CONTROL IN ALL THE STRAIGHT BAT SHOTS.** By using your top hand more than your bottom hand you have more chances of hitting the ball with a straight bat down the line of the ball. The bat must be held firmly with the top hand through the shot. It will also help to keep the bottom hand under control. In all straight bat shots the bottom hand plays the supporting role and puts punch into the shot as the bat reaches the impact area between the bat and the ball. *"The top hand creates the start of the bat swing and bottom hand concludes it," said Bob Woolmer.* If the bottom hand comes through too early the toe of the blade of the bat can reach vertical or beyond it at the point of impact, causing the ball to be lifted in the air. Also learn to value your wicket. The top batsmen have always put high value on their wicket. They are loathe to giving the opposition the satisfaction of dismissing them. Virender Sehwag is a fine example of what determination can achieve.

■ **MOVE SIDEWAYS-KEEP SIDEWAYS.** *"Cricket is a side-on game. Time and again I see young batsmen around Australia who defy the side-on idea and they make the things so much harder for themselves," says Greg Chappell.* This statement is applicable to most of the batsmen playing cricket all over the world. Sunil Gavaskar was a model batsman and he was a very side-on player indeed. Young batsmen have a tendency to square up on the back foot and once that happens it is impossible to maintain the side-on position. *The secret of keeping the body in side on position lies in the backfoot as it should be parallel to the batting crease.* It is easier to allow the momentum generated by the body to be efficiently transferred in the direction of the stroke from this position. You should have the confidence in your timing rather than opening up too early. The front shoulder should lead the body and the bat into the line of the ball, allowing full rotation to generate power in the direction of the stroke. Only from side-on position can you meet the ball below your head at the time of impact in all straight bat shots. Take up side on position to the direction from which the ball will be bowled and place your body side on to the intended line of the shot.



■ **KEEP YOURSELF PHYSICALLY FIT AS THIS PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN YOUR SUCCESS. REMEMBER CRICKET IS A GAME OF FAST REFLEXES.** Although batting may not appear to be too strenuous it has often been seen during matches that batsmen lose concentration because they had not recovered fully after a series of singles in quick succession. *There is a saying "skills deteriorates as fatigue develops."* A good batsman should have the fitness to occupy the crease for at least two hours without fatigue affecting his speed in running between the wickets, reaction time and the general movement speed.

### **ALL THE BATSMEN SHOULD FULFILL THE FOLLOWING FITNESS REQUIREMENTS:**

- (A) Strength in forearms and wrists to maximize force in strokes;
- (B) Shuttle speed for running between the wickets;
- (C) Agility for quick footwork;
- (D) Endurance for running between the wickets with quick recovery. It will also help sustain concentration throughout a long innings;
- (E) Flexibility. It is essential particularly in the lower back, groin, hamstring etc.

You may take the help of a physical conditioning expert or a coach to develop an individualised training programme suitable for you.

■ **BE DETERMINED TO SUCCEED.** *Even as gifted a player as Sachin Tendulkar says that "hunger" is the difference between a good player and a great one, it is the will to perform well that makes the difference.* It is a statement which is truly applicable at every level of the game. Natural ability is indeed important but it is not enough. Some of the best batsmen of all time used determination to build on natural ability they had. Your determination will take you much further than your talent alone might take you on its own. Over the years many cricketers with no more than average natural ability eventually reached the top and played in Test matches thus proving that hard work can take you all the way.