

# Contributors

WE ARE PLEASED TO INTRODUCE YOU TO A WORLD CLASS TEAM OF COACHES, SCIENTISTS, COACH EDUCATORS AND CONSULTANTS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO 'ON THE UP'.



**JOHN ABRAHAMS**

John Abrahams was a first class cricketer with Lancashire County Cricket Club from 1973 to 1988. He joined the ECB (then NCA) as a National Coach in 1991. John is currently the ECB's Elite Player Development Manager and has applied his vast experience extensively within our National Age Group and

National Academy and Coach Education programmes.



**DAVE ALRED**

Dave is regarded as the world's best rugby kicking coach and leads the field in approaches to skills acquisition and mental preparation. He was England assistant coach (1995-2006), and a British Lions assistant for three tours. As well as coaching teams, he concentrates a great deal of time on

developing individual performance, believing that this is the foundation of a team's success.



**ZUBIN BHARUCHA**

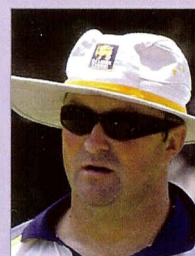
Zubin Bharucha is a former first class cricketer, having had a short but successful first class career for Mumbai. He had the distinction of scoring centuries on debut in both India's premier championships - the Ranji and the Irani Trophies - only to be emulated by the great Sachin Tendulkar.

Zubin finished his first class career with an average of 42 from 17 games.



**JIM COLLIS**

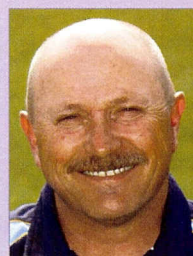
Jim Collis is an accredited RYA Instructor Trainer for both the adult scheme and the 'team15' junior scheme, a professional coach for all levels, and the Test Editor and Technique Editor for Windsurf Magazine.



**PAUL FARBRACE**

A former first class cricketer with Kent and Middlesex, Paul has recently accepted a position as Sri Lanka's Assistant Coach. Prior to this, he worked as Kent CCC's Academy Director and 2nd XI coach. A former ECB National Coach for the Eastern Region, he has worked successfully with the England U15, U17

and U19 teams, as well as with the England Women's team. As a specialist wicket keeping coach, he leads the ECB Level 4 Wicket Keeping Module. Paul qualified at Level 4 in 2002.



**DAVE HOUGHTON**

Dave Houghton is a former Zimbabwean test cricketer. Since retiring as a player, he has gone on to become a coach and commentator. Coach of Zimbabwe 1996-2000 and Coach of Worcestershire 1994-97, he was also Head Coach at Derbyshire CCC from 2004-07 and has recently been coaching at the National

Cricket Performance Centre with the National Skill Sets.



# Playing spin

By Zubin Bharucha

The key fundamentals that all great players of spin have possessed is good footwork, which effectively translates to using the depth of the crease and playing off two feet to maximum advantage. We have split the discussion on playing spin into:

- 1) General observations
- 2) Playing leg spin
- 3) Playing off spin
- 4) Initial movement/press (forward)

## 1) General observations

Let's begin the thought process by simplifying the way in which we approach the topic of playing spin. We often hear commentators say this wicket is a slow turner, well, what else, if the ball spins, by default it's a slow wicket, there really isn't anything like a fast turner!

The spinner also has several restrictions; he cannot really bowl a bouncer and is restricted to pitching the ball in a very narrow area to be effective. So, logically speaking, with such few options at his disposal, it should be easier for a batsman to cope with. Hence, there's absolutely no need to cloud our approach with a variety of defeatist theories.

Instead, all we should be doing is practising a few skills which need to be mastered in the following order:

a) Going back and being able to take the front foot behind the body to play the spinner. This will disrupt that narrow area in which the spinner needs to bowl to be effective and yet minimising the risks for the batsman.

b) Staying on two feet to be able to place the ball. This will enable conversion of a no-run into a single and the single into two, and so

on. A batsman must also learn to step out to drive to disrupt the length which the spinner so crucially needs to bowl in order to trouble the batsman.

Playing spin is even more about anticipation, as the deviation off the wicket is slower and far more pronounced, so one needs to maintain a neutral position for as long as possible to be able to appropriately judge length. A common ingredient we observe of those who don't play spin well is that they play 'at the line of the ball' instead of leaving a margin for or anticipating spin. Whilst playing a left arm spinner/leg spinner, right hand batsmen must play a little outside the ball. If the ball goes straight on, it will strike the inside half of the bat.

It is also critical to maintain balance, generate power and place the ball and, to do this effectively, weight should be kept on both feet.

Like anything else, it's a question of discovering what works within a batsman's technique to counteract the spin and then practise the same diligently. We have suggested tips and drills which can be practised to improve a batsman's game against spin.

Figure 1 depicts how the batsman is going to stay on both feet, transferring weight at the point of contact and placing the ball on the on-side.

Once again, the batsman's alignment is set to play everything straight, putting pressure on the front foot to push off and go back (you can just see the back foot lifting to move back in figure 2).

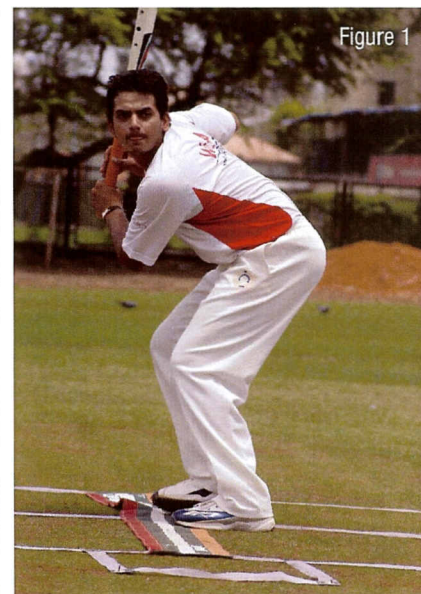


Figure 1

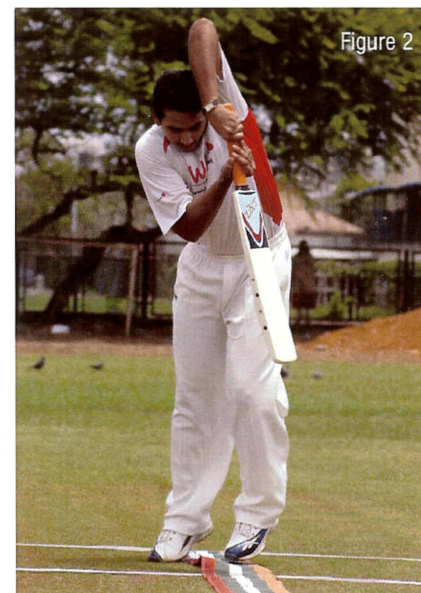


Figure 2

The batsman has then made room to play the ball on the on-side, keeping his eyes on the point of contact (figure 3). He has also maintained a good side-on position at the crease, with his legs well spaced out to allow space for the bat to come down (figure 4).



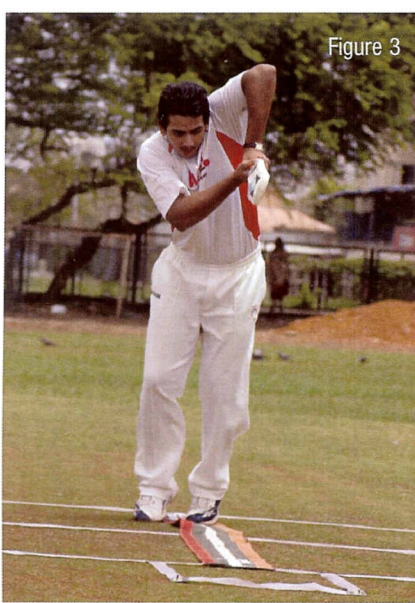


Figure 3



Figure 4

Just at or immediately after the point of contact, the legs begin to cross giving the batsman more options to place the ball on the on-side (or off-side).

Once again, he maintains his balance with his head staying focused on the point of contact and looking ahead. He has also brought his back leg in front of the middle stump after completing the shot, which enables him to keep the ball down. Having both feet firmly implanted on the ground gives him effortless power, as his weight has transferred at the appropriate moment at the point of impact.

This way of transferring weight and taking the front foot back behind the body (figure 4) also

enables the batsman to play the ball late, giving him the opportunity to judge what the ball is doing until the last possible moment.

This foot movement can be used for both on and off-side shots and is especially important when facing spinners. It is imperative for coaches to teach this movement so that batsmen have this movement in their armoury to disrupt the spinner's length, and further still, taking little or no risk.

## 2) Playing leg spin

Another common mistake a batsman may make whilst playing spin is to open his front foot to play balls on the leg stump. Once the foot goes outside the leg stump, there is no where for the other (back) foot to go but fall over to the off-side, thereby leaving the head/eyes in a bad position to play the ball. Once the head falls over, it is extremely difficult to keep the ball down on the on-side. The next problem it creates is exposing the stumps to the ball and giving the bowler two options of getting the batsman out, i.e. bowled or caught behind/at slip. Furthermore, it is also impossible to judge the degree of spin if a batsman opens up his front leg. This completely reduces his options of playing against the spinning ball and further reduces the chances of surviving, let alone scoring.

While playing leg spin, the great players of spin anticipate the ball to turn with the alignment. The outer half of the bat is aligned and covering for the spin and the inner half of the bat is aligned to cover for the straight through. From this alignment, a batsman has enough time to adapt to either the straight ball or the one that turns. Obviously, this coincides with anticipation, watching the bowler's hand, quickly discerning what the bowler is capable of doing with the ball, and playing well in front of the pad.

Another very basic but common mistake made while playing leg spin is a wrongly angled bat on impact. Invariably, this is not straight, but towards cover. Once again, this translates to presenting only half a bat to the ball, not giving the maximum opportunity to connect.

A tip while practising playing leg spin or orthodox left arm spin would be to try and play against the spin/break on the front foot on the on-side and with the break on the back foot on the off-side (unless the ball is very short and you can pull it off the back foot). So, try and drive a ball which you would have normally driven to cover to mid-off and the next time to mid-on and then mid-wicket by constantly altering where you land your front foot to play the ball. This is a great exercise, as we know we can always drive the ball to cover - this is easy - but to practise driving the ball where it isn't easy to drive is great practice. Also, do the same while defending - if the ball has dropped on the off-side in the direction of point, try and drop the next one in the direction of cover, then mid-off, then mid-on, mid-wicket, square-leg and even fine leg. Try not to leave too many balls, but get yourself into a position to defend, even if the balls are well outside the off stump. You can do this by keeping the downswing slightly outside the line of the ball, as well as taking your foot further and further across towards the ball.

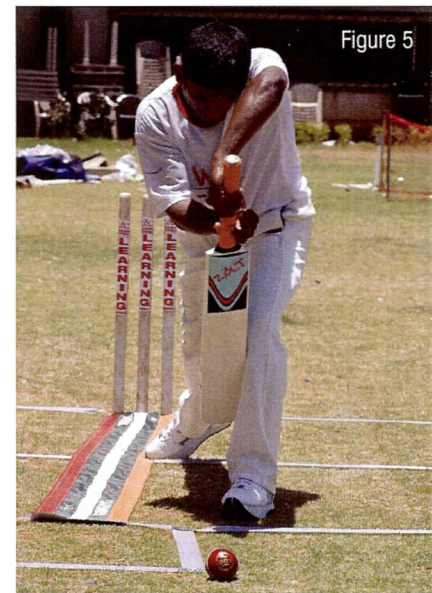


Figure 5

The way of playing as shown in figure 5 gives the bowler two options to get a batsman out - caught at slip or bowled by a ball turning away. In addition, it is virtually impossible to maintain balance when the front foot is at this angle, as there is no base being created and there is no option but to fall over, creating even more problems.



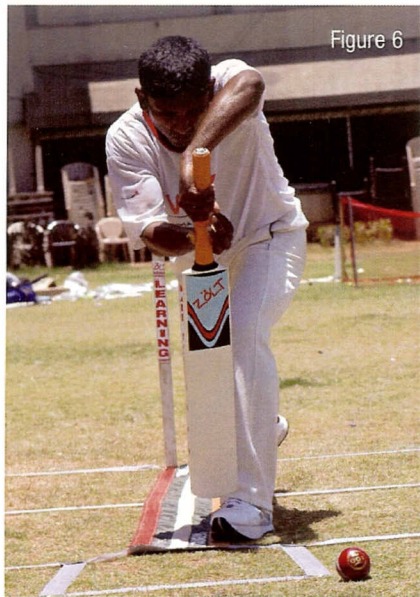


Figure 6

In figure 6, the batsman has done a few things correctly - anticipating that the ball will turn and so he has positioned his foot slightly outside the line of the ball, covering his stumps and offering the full face of the bat to the ball, reducing his risk of bowled or caught at slip (as in figure 5). As batsmanship is about maximising scoring opportunities and minimising risk in doing so, this seems to be a more logical way of playing a leg spinner with the ball turning away.

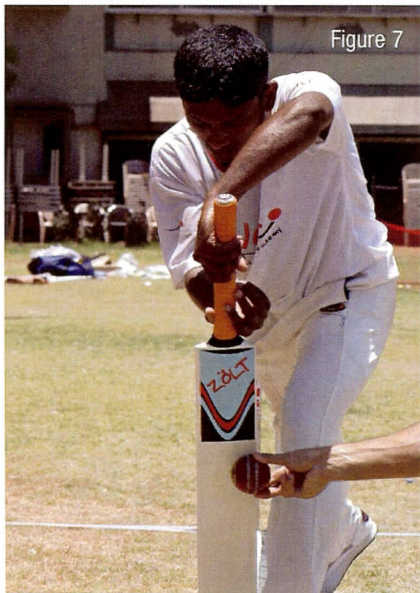


Figure 7

If the ball goes straight on and doesn't spin, it should meet the inside half of the bat (figure 7).

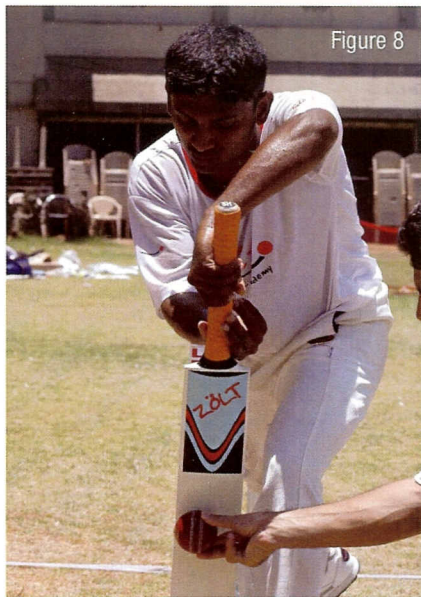


Figure 8

If the ball spins, it should meet the outside half of the bat (figure 8). The batsman is also playing well in front of his pad and his head is positioned right on top and close to the ball.

### 3) Playing off spin

The alignment a batsman follows while playing off spin is to play down the line of the straight ball and then turn the bat using the top hand as the ball turns in.

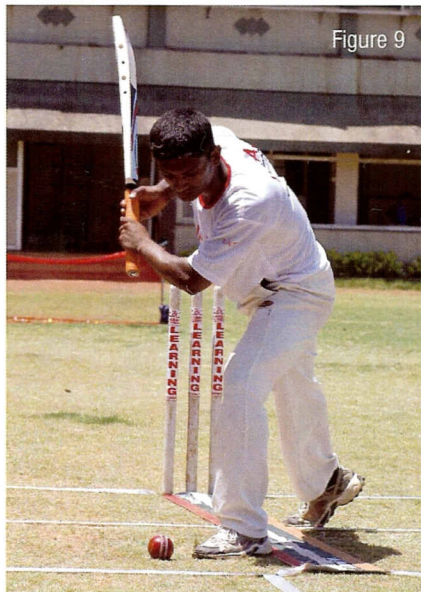


Figure 9

The key, however, to playing off spin well is to get the downswing of the bat exactly down the original path of the ball before it spins, with the foot going to the pitch of the ball (as in figures 9 and 10). The foot goes across towards the ball, but the bat remains straight along with the

shoulder, so as to ensure the downswing meets with the line of the ball if it were to go straight off the wicket (as it turns, only the top hand will be used to turn the bat towards the ball should it spin into the batsman).

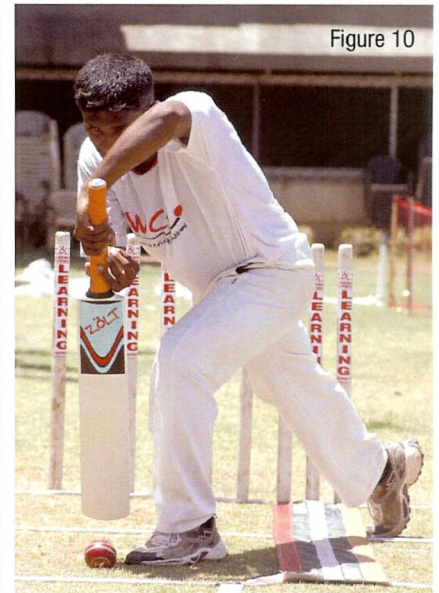


Figure 10

Figures 11 and 12 show how a batsman should NOT play an off spinner (or for that matter other types of bowlers, but particularly the off spinner for a right hand batsman).

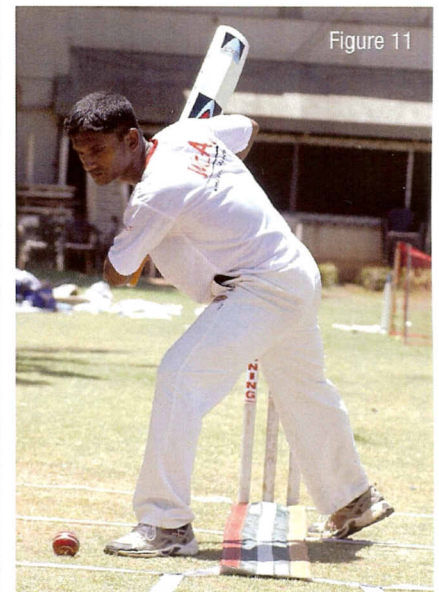


Figure 11



Figure 12



The problem players have while playing off spin is that they turn their shoulder too early (towards the ball) and get into a position from where the downswing of the bat is incorrect and gives the bowlers two options to get a wicket - caught at slip or caught bat-pad on the on-side.

A tip while practising would be to try and play everything against the break off the back foot on the off-side and everything with the break on the front foot on the on-side. Also, remember to check the downswing, as it is the most important aspect of playing in the manner suggested above.

Figure 13

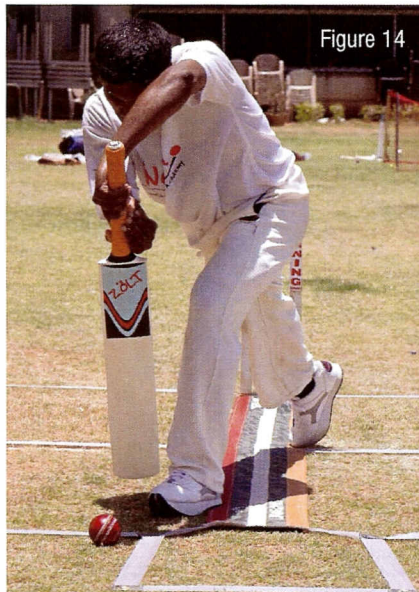
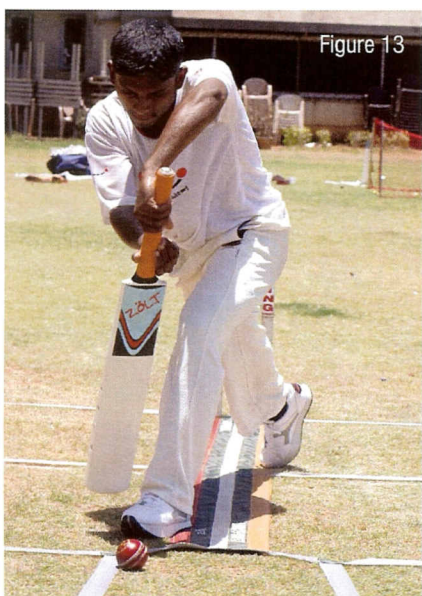


Figure 14



Figure 15

In figures 13, 14 and 15, the batsman has got across to the off-side to get in line with the ball should it go straight on. This is the default alignment a batsman should seek whilst playing off spin. Then, if the ball turns into the batsman, all he needs to do is use the top hand to turn with the ball, diverting it over to the on-side.

#### 4) Initial movement/press (forward)

There is a lot of debate regarding an initial movement/pushing forward or the forward press as deployed by many players from those countries who are not brought up on slow, low wickets.

One needs to understand the dynamics behind the forward press and its purpose. There are two aspects - transfer of weight and getting into a good position to play the sweep. Both of these can be counteracted through less risky options.

With a little bit of practice early in their careers (against spinners on turning wickets), players from countries who are not used to spinning conditions would be able to adapt easily without the restrictions of the forward press.

If one were to argue the objective of the forward press is to get into a good position to sweep, this line of thought itself is self-defeating and sets you down the road to failure, as one needs to remain neutral to play all around the wicket to give yourself more options and not pre-empt a particular shot. We believe players need to be constantly exposed to playing against spin and conditions which assist spin, before deciding a particular type of method needs to be adopted. To admit one is not capable enough, and hence using the forward press as a standard rule for everyone, is not logical.

Furthermore, using the forward press hinders the very essence of what all the top quality players propagate to counter quality spin, i.e. the use of the depth of the crease and the full range of forward and back foot movements. When a batsman forward presses, his range of movement is restricted. By taking a small step forward, getting back is definitely restricted, and two movements to get back are virtually impossible (unless one is playing Mickey Mouse bowlers). Another vital aspect is that the forward press restricts the ability to judge length, because by committing so much so early, a batsman automatically restricts himself to playing at a certain length and adjusting becomes even more difficult.

Hence, if a batsman takes a forward movement and misjudges the length (which will be more often than not), and now needs to go back to play the ball, his front foot will go back to where the back foot is positioned (i.e. leg stump) instead of in line with the ball. This leaves no option but to stick the bat out at the



ball or fish for the ball. This scenario is no different while playing fast bowling, when a batsman commits early on the front foot and misjudges the length; then the batsman decides to go back, which takes him to where the back foot is situated (i.e. on leg stump) while the ball continues down the off-side, leaving the batsman no option but to hang his bat outside the off stump.

Use of the feet while playing spinners does not necessarily mean stepping out of the crease to play the ball, but actually the appropriate use of the depth of the crease. However, learning to step out is an art a batsman needs to learn, not only to score runs but also disrupt the bowler's thinking.

The simplest way to counter the restrictions of the forward press is to simply take weight off the back foot, so that all the weight is on the front leg, yet the batsman has not committed and so is in a great position to make a forward movement or transfer weight and move back to play. Moreover, it has the same effect, but with none of the restrictions that come with a forward press.



Figure 16

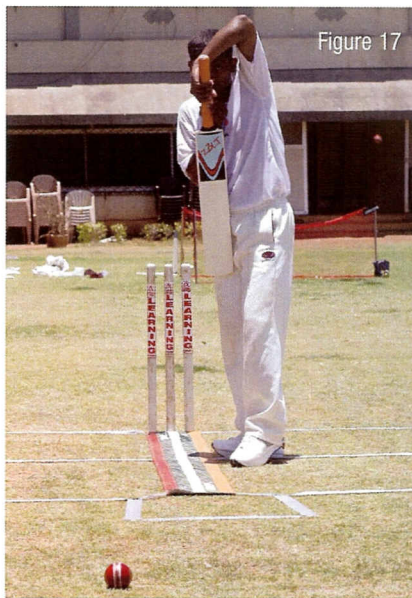


Figure 17

In figures 16 and 17, the batsman has pressed forward but realises he has misjudged the length, so he decides to move back. He has no options but to take his front foot back to where the back foot is. This leaves the batsman in a terrible position to now play the ball and invariably he is left with simply hanging the bat outside the off stump (this occurs both whilst playing fast bowlers and spinners - of course, the problem is accentuated a lot more when playing fast bowlers and less so while playing spinners as there is more time to adjust).

Figures 16 and 17 show how this early forward movement/press alters the ability of the batsman to get in line with the ball. This happens often when a batsman begins his innings.

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