

LEVEL-O CERTIFICATE COURSE IN CRICKET COACHING

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Week 06

Lecture 31: GRIP OF BASIC BOWLING ACTION

Welcome to the first bowling session. After extensive discussions on batting techniques, we are now turning our attention to pace bowling. In international cricket, pace bowling is a dynamic and impactful style of bowling where the bowler delivers the ball at high speed, using skill full techniques to trouble the batter. Pace bowlers often have a long run-up that helps them generate speed and maintain control over their delivery. Their precision and ability to create pressure on the batter make pace bowling an essential aspect of the game.

Many legendary players have made significant contributions to the world of pace bowling. Shoaib Akhtar, Shaun Tait, and Brett Lee are renowned for their exceptional speed, while figures like Imran Khan, Kapil Dev, and Wasim Akram have left an indelible mark with their mastery of the craft. In modern cricket, stars like Jasprit Bumrah and Mitchell Starc continue to dominate the field with their skillfull pace bowling techniques.

When coaching pace bowling, it is important to focus on building a strong foundation. For beginners who are unfamiliar with pace bowling, the process starts with teaching fundamental techniques, such as proper grip, a smooth and consistent run-up, and an effective release point. For more experienced players who already possess some understanding of pace bowling, coaching emphasizes refinement and modification to enhance their performance. This methodical approach ensures that young bowlers develop essential skills and progress confidently from basic techniques to advanced strategies.

A cricketer's basic actions, techniques, and fundamental skills are essential, especially in pace bowling. These must always be kept in mind and remembered while developing bowling skills. Starting with pace bowling, one of the first and most important aspects is how to grip the ball. Proper grip is a fundamental skill that forms the foundation of effective bowling. The index finger and the middle finger should be positioned on either side of the seam, while the thumb should be placed under the ball, aligned with the seam. The ball

rests on the base of the fingers, creating a small gap or window that allows for a firm and controlled grip. The ring finger and little finger act as supports to stabilize the ball during delivery. As a coach, it is necessary to observe this grip to ensure that all fingers are positioned correctly and there is adequate spacing for effective control. This grip technique is considered the basic fast-bowling grip.

Once the grip is mastered, the next step is developing the fundamental bowling action. A pace bowler's run-up is crucial as it helps generate speed and control over the delivery. Stability and balance must be maintained throughout the run-up, the landing, and the follow-through to ensure a smooth and accurate bowling performance. During the delivery, the alignment of the bowler's entire body should be directed towards the target to achieve precision and effectiveness.

The framework for pace bowling can be outlined using three key aspects, often referred to as the "ABC" of fast bowling. Firstly, alignment is vital, as the bowler's body should remain in a straight line with the target throughout the bowling action. Secondly, balance is crucial to maintain stability during the run-up, delivery, and follow-through. Thirdly, corridor refers to delivering the ball in a specific area, often called the corridor of uncertainty, to challenge the batter and increase the chances of success. These principles, combined with a strong grip and a well-practiced action, form the building blocks for skilled and confident pace bowling.

By focusing on these basics, pace bowlers can refine their techniques and progress from fundamental skills to advanced strategies. This methodical approach ensures that both beginners and experienced players can excel in the art of pace bowling.

If my body is straight and every part, including my non-bowling arm, shoulder, torso, and bowling arm, lies along the same line, then that line becomes the target for my bowling. This position is what we call alignment. Every element of a fast bowler's body must be in a single straight line—from the bowler's shoulder to the bowling arm—to ensure consistency and accuracy when delivering the ball.

Balance, or stability, is equally important in fast bowling. A successful delivery starts at the run-up, continues through the jump and the release, and even follows through. Without proper balance, a bowler's momentum can become unmanageable; this imbalance may result in a fall or an erratic delivery. Maintaining dynamic balance means using proper techniques throughout the entire action—from the run-up to the jump, from release to follow-through—which ensures that the bowler maintains control of the high speed and

momentum generated during the approach. The impressive run-ups and jumps of accomplished bowlers clearly demonstrate the vital role balance plays in effective pace bowling.

Another key principle in pace bowling is what we call the corridor. A bowler should run in a straight corridor rather than a zigzag or curved path. This straight-line run-up is crucial because it helps the bowler stay aligned with the intended target, whether aiming for the up stump or the middle stump. By maintaining a consistent corridor, the bowler ensures that every part of the run-up and delivery is optimized for accuracy and control.

The entire process of pace bowling is built on these fundamental principles—alignment, balance, and a straight corridor—which are crucial whether one is coaching a seasoned pace bowler or working with a novice. Understanding these basic actions allows coaches to correct flaws and build strong, injury-free techniques in their players.

In addition to these guiding principles, there are three scientifically endorsed basic bowling actions known for being injury free: the side-on action, the front-on action, and the semi-action. The side-on action is identified when a bowler's back foot lands parallel to the bowling crease. In this position, the bowler's hip and shoulder are directed toward the target, and the extended front arm helps maintain the correct alignment. In contrast, the front-on action is observed when the back foot lands squarely between the mid-wicket and the batter, aligning the hip and shoulder directly with the target. This ensures that the bowler's body is geared straight toward the intended mark. The third style, the semi-action, combines elements of both techniques; here, the back foot lands between the mid-wicket and the batter, while the bowler looks through an extended arm with the shoulder slightly across the back, providing a blend of natural movement and stability.

Recognizing these distinct actions—side-on, front-on, and semi-action—is essential during coaching sessions. It allows a coach to observe whether a bowler's back foot lands in the appropriate position for the intended technique and whether their body alignment is maintained throughout the delivery. By focusing on these basic actions, coaches can better address and correct the issues of both ready-made pace bowlers and novices, thereby ensuring an organized, efficient, and effective coaching session.

In pace bowling, it is crucial to adhere to three basic actions—side-on, front-on, and semi-action. Many excellent bowlers exemplify these techniques. For instance, prominent players such as Shoaib Akhtar, Kapil Dev, Imran Khan, and even some noted as “Chinese lily” have used the side-on action consistently. In contrast, for the front-on action, bowlers

like the West Indian exponent Holder (sometimes referenced with names like “flint top”) have demonstrated this style effectively. For the semi-action, examples include Australian pace bowlers such as Brett Lee and Mitchell Starc, who blend elements of both side-on and front-on techniques. When coaching, these examples serve as a guide for distinguishing and instructing the proper form that each basic action demands.

Injury is a critical issue in pace bowling because even a minor injury can shorten a player’s career. There are three primary factors that predispose bowlers to injuries. The first is poor physical preparation. A pace bowler must be physically fit—with strong shoulders, well-developed muscles throughout the body, and sturdy thighs—to absorb the forces generated during fast bowling. A proper warm-up is essential in this regard; without it, a bowler risks throwing excessive strain on the body, which might lead to injury. Being physically prepared not only supports the bowler’s performance but also reduces the risk of injury caused by the high impact of fast deliveries.

The second factor is over-bowling, which refers to the act of bowling for extended periods with insufficient rest. For instance, a session might consist of 36, 42, or even 48 balls, depending on the age and condition of the player. When a bowler continues without adequate time for recovery, stress and strain build up in the body, manifesting as fatigue, disturbances in line and length, and a diminished mental focus on fast bowling. Coaches must be vigilant in recognizing these warning signs and must ensure that players are given rest before their technique starts to suffer. Over-bowling can lead to overexertion, causing the bowler to try to make up for fatigue by overexerting themselves, which inevitably increases the risk of injury.

The third significant factor is poor technique, often evident when a bowler deviates from the recommended actions by adopting a mixed action. A mixed action occurs when there is an inconsistency in the bowling technique—for example, if a bowler’s back foot lands perfectly parallel to the bowling crease (indicating a side-on action) but the front shoulder opens or aligns as if executing a front-on action. Such counter-rotations in the body create undue stress, particularly on the back and lower back, and may lead to long-term issues such as spondylitis. In some cases, professional bowlers have experienced chronic back pain that forced them to alter formats; a notable example is Jimmy Anderson, who had a history of mixed action that contributed to persistent back problems. Additionally, an overly vigorous or mismatched run-up, where excessive vertical jumping causes the landing force to be several times heavier than normal, can also lead to knee or ankle injuries. To prevent these issues, it is essential that coaches emphasize a clean, single-phase

run-up and maintain proper technique throughout, ensuring that the young cricketer's action is built on solid, scientifically validated movements. Using methods such as one-step, three-step, or run-and-bowl drills during coaching can help develop and reinforce proper basic bowling action from an early age, ultimately reducing the risks of mixed actions and subsequent injuries.

To develop an effective pace bowling technique, it is essential that the bowler builds a strong basic action. This basic action can be executed in one of three recommended ways: side-on, front-on, or semi-action. If a bowler's technique is mixed or inconsistent, it is possible to adjust and convert it into a proper building basic action—often leaning toward a semi-action—to reduce injury risk and improve performance.

The session on building the basic bowling action begins with understanding how the bowler steps into the delivery. The first and foremost step is to teach the concept of standing bowling. Standing bowling is where the bowler positions themselves with proper alignment, holding the stumps or markers at a set distance, and releasing the ball without a run-up. In this phase, the emphasis is on keeping the arms, legs, shoulders, and hips aligned so that when the bowler releases the ball, everything is in one straight line toward the target. This helps the bowler understand the proper body position before moving into dynamic footwork.

Once the bowler is comfortable with standing bowling, the next step is one-step bowling. In one-step bowling, the bowler takes a single step from a static stance before the delivery. For a right-handed bowler, this involves moving the left leg forward. The process involves guiding the bowler to position markers—imaginary or physical cones—about one foot apart from the stumps, which serve as visual cues to maintain the correct distance and alignment. The bowler steps forward with the left leg, lands the back foot, and then delivers the ball. This one-step technique reinforces the sequential movement from a static position into a fluid bowling action. The coach demonstrates from a side view, emphasizing that the left leg moves first followed by the correct landing of the back (right) foot near the marker, leading into a balanced and loaded delivery.

After mastering one-step bowling, the bowler is introduced to three-step bowling. With three-step bowling, an additional marker is set, creating a series of three positions. This method helps in developing better rhythm, coordination, and balance during a longer run-up. The bowler starts from a designated point near the stumps, takes three deliberate steps—ensuring that each step maintains proper alignment—and then loads the body before

delivering the ball. The sequence of the steps, the placement of the markers, and the transition into the delivery help in building an efficient and injury-free action. It is crucial that every part of the body moves in harmony: the shoulders, hips, legs, and arms must all work together to ensure that the ball is released with maximum control and minimal risk of injury.

The essence of building the basic action is progression—from standing bowling to one-step and finally to three-step bowling. This sequential building process is vital when coaching novice bowlers, as it ensures that they develop the necessary coordination and stability gradually. By using markers or cones to guide the steps and careful observation from different views, the coach can help the bowler understand where adjustments need to be made. The key is to install a routine where every movement is deliberate; the bowler learns to step, load, and release with the same alignment as recommended by the three basic bowling actions (side-on, front-on, or semi-action).

By following these structured methods and providing clear demonstrations, coaches can help players eliminate mixed actions and convert any inconsistent technique into a sound, repeatable basic bowling action. This not only builds confidence in the bowler's technique but also contributes to a reduction in injury risk. When the bowler's entire sequence—from the stepping phase, through the loading phase, to the final delivery—is well-coordinated, it forms the foundation upon which more advanced pace bowling skills can be safely developed.

To build the basic bowling action, begin by instructing the player to assume the ball-holding position in preparation for movement. The sequence starts with the player taking the ball and then moving their left leg forward, followed by the right leg bending, and finally the left leg taking the final step. This marks the three-step process: left, right, left. After these three steps, the player proceeds to the back-foot landing, where they load their body before releasing the ball. This whole progression—from stepping to loading and then bowling—is the foundation of three-step bowling.

Once the initial demonstration is complete, the player practices the process: first, a one-step bowling drill, where the emphasis is on controlled movement and proper placement; then the transition to three-step bowling is introduced. During the three-step drill, the coach instructs the player to take a step with the left leg, then a second step with the right, and a third step with the left again before landing the back foot, loading the body, and bowling. It is essential for the player to lean forward throughout the process, ensuring that when the

back foot lands, the body rises straight up to channel the energy efficiently during the release. The coach reinforces these points by demonstrating the procedure from both side and front views, illustrating the proper position and the ideal sequence of movements—left step, right step, left step, back-foot landing, and then ball release.

After mastering the process with markers on the field—using cones to guide the positioning and maintain proper spacing—the player is encouraged to practice the same routine with the markers in place. This “three-step bowling with markers” drill installs muscle memory, as the precise layout helps the bowler understand alignment, balance, and timing. Once the bowler consistently executes the drill correctly, the next phase “run and bowl” is introduced. In this phase, the bowler runs through the designated corridor, maintaining balance and alignment as they approach the delivery zone. Here, their body forms a straight line toward the target, and during the run, the same three-step sequence is observed: left, right, left, followed by back-foot landing, loading, and finally, releasing the ball. This drill is repeated until the bowler confidently performs the action without relying on the physical markers.

When coaching, it is critical to tailor these drills according to the individual’s stage of development. For a novice player, start with standing bowling to establish correct alignment and balance, then gradually progress to one-step bowling, followed by three-step bowling with markers, and finally transition to an unassisted run and bowl. This systematic approach not only builds the basic action step by step but also serves as a corrective measure for bowlers with observed issues such as suspected actions or mixed actions (for example, when the back foot and the arm’s alignment do not match). With consistent, supervised practice and, if necessary, video analysis, any inconsistencies—whether in throwing, chucking, or mixed actions that may cause lower-back pain—can be corrected by reverting the bowler back to the foundational standing and one-step techniques before gradually progressing again.

By maintaining focus on these sequential drills and always emphasizing proper posture, lean, and alignment, a coach ensures that budding pace bowlers develop a solid, repeatable basic bowling action. This methodical approach not only enhances performance in pace bowling but also minimizes the risk of injury, allowing the bowler’s career to develop steadily without the setbacks of mixed or improper actions. Ultimately, whether transitioning from standing bowling to one-step, three-step, or full run and bowl, the commitment to these foundational drills is paramount for long-term success on the field.

In the loading phase, the focus is on preparing the body for an effective delivery. Loading is the moment when the bowler sets up all elements of the batting action before releasing the ball—it is similar to the position taken by an archer just as they draw their bow. After completing the run-up, when the back foot lands, the bowler must achieve a proper loading position. For a right-handed bowler, this means positioning the right arm correctly so that from both the front and side views, the arm aligns with the body in a way that leads the ball toward the target. At this phase, the long bowling arm should come forward, the shoulder and hip must be pointed toward the target, and the ball must be brought to a consistent loading height, typically up to eyebrow level. It is critical that the elbow is directed toward the ground so that the arm does not drop excessively, ensuring that the energy built up during the run-up is efficiently transferred into the delivery.

To help a bowler maintain the correct loading form, a useful drill involves using a ribbon attached to the right wrist. The ribbon acts as a visual guide—by watching its position as they assume the loading phase, the bowler learns to control the position of the arm and prevent the ball from falling too far back or deviating from the desired path. The coach emphasizes that during loading, the bowler must always be aware of the ribbon, which reinforces proper alignment and timing. The correct loading posture ensures that when the bowler transitions into the release, the force is directed appropriately rather than being wasted through a backward motion. This drill is particularly valuable for beginners who are still mastering the sense of timing and coordination required in the loading phase.

Following a successful loading phase, attention shifts to the release position. In pace bowling, the ideal release is achieved by delivering the ball from above, in what is often described as a vertical release position, where the ball comes out from the top of the head. Variations exist depending on the style or the intended delivery—sometimes the ball may be released slightly to the side or even past vertical—but a fundamental vertical release generally provides the optimal trajectory and control. Coaches must observe the release closely, ensuring that the bowler maintains an appropriate posture throughout the delivery in order to achieve consistent accuracy and pace.

As the session moves into run-up mechanics, the principles of alignment and balance become paramount. The run-up must be economical yet progressive, designed to build momentum gradually and then transfer that energy into a controlled delivery. A key aspect of a successful run-up is the proper footwork, which involves a natural heel-to-ball-to-toe movement. This approach allows for effective body weight transfer and helps maintain dynamic balance. When a bowler runs with the ball in hand, it is important that the arm

holding the ball stays close to the body, with the hand following a natural line that minimizes stray movements. This not only preserves alignment but also prevents disruptions that could cause a loss of balance during the final loading phase.

Coaches often use markers or cones to help develop the run-up in stages—from standing bowling, to one-step bowling, then moving to three-step bowling, and finally progressing to a full "run and bowl." The process begins with a controlled sequence where the left leg is brought forward, followed by the right, and then the left again, culminating in a back-foot landing that loads the body in preparation for the ball delivery. Players are taught to lean forward deliberately during the back-foot landing, ensuring that their body rises vertically into the delivery. With repeated practice—first with markers to establish correct spacing and alignment, then without them—the bowler develops muscle memory that ingrains the correct timing and posture.