

LEVEL-0 CERTIFICATE COURSE IN CRICKET COACHING

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Lecture 58: Wicket Keeping Standing Back

In cricket, the standing back position refers to the position a wicketkeeper adopts when facing a fast bowler. Unlike when keeping to a spinner, where the keeper stands close to the stumps, against pace bowling, the wicketkeeper moves farther back to account for the greater ball speed and bounce. The exact distance the keeper stands back depends on a combination of factors: the bowler's pace, the nature of the pitch (bouncy or slow), and the height the ball is expected to reach, ideally around the waist height of the keeper. The goal is for the ball to arrive at a comfortable height to catch safely while giving the keeper enough reaction time.

While standing back, the stance of the wicketkeeper should resemble that of a slip fielder, but slightly more square to the pitch. The feet should remain shoulder-width apart, with knees flexed, body weight balanced on the balls of the feet, and hands positioned comfortably in front of the body. The head must remain still, and eyes fixed on the ball throughout its travel. The glove work when standing back follows similar principles as standing up, but with a few key differences. When receiving deliveries at pace, the wicketkeeper must keep the gloves on the inner side of the thighs, close to the body and stumps, with the palms open and angled slightly upwards to receive rising balls.

A critical aspect of glove work is learning to "move with the ball"—allowing the hands to rise or fall naturally with the ball's bounce. For balls rising towards the chest or shoulder level, the hands should come up with the ball in a fluid motion, maintaining soft hands and flexibility. The fingers of the gloves must point upwards, ideally at a 90-degree angle to the path of the incoming ball, helping to reduce hard rebounds or missed takes.

Footwork for standing back involves two main movement techniques: the skip method and the crossover step. In the skip method, the wicketkeeper uses small, quick hops or shuffles to reposition laterally, keeping both feet relatively aligned. This helps maintain a low,

stable base and is useful for minor adjustments. The crossover step, on the other hand, is used when covering more ground, such as when diving or reacting to a wide ball. In this method, one foot crosses over the other, allowing the keeper to cover more distance while staying balanced. Both techniques should be practised thoroughly, with the focus on keeping the head in line with the ball and moving in a straight lateral plane, without excessive vertical motion.

When it comes to positioning, the wicketkeeper should not only stand the correct distance back but also align himself with the off stump of a right-handed batter. This means the keeper should follow an imaginary line from the off stump, ensuring he remains in a direct line with the bowler's delivery angle. This off-stump alignment helps in judging the ball's line, especially when it nicks the edge of the bat.

To develop wicketkeeping reflexes and movement, several drills can be incorporated into coaching. One such drill is the deflection drill, where the coach deliberately deflects the ball using a bat or stump, forcing the wicketkeeper to react quickly to unpredictable bounces. This sharpens reflexes and improves glove coordination. Another is the bat lift drill, where the coach simulates a bat lift after the ball passes, teaching the keeper to remain focused and catch the ball cleanly despite distractions.

A highly effective and specific exercise is the chair drill. In this drill, a feeder throws the ball between the legs of a chair placed on the pitch, simulating balls moving towards the leg stump. The wicketkeeper must move swiftly, using the crossover step to collect the ball cleanly. This helps build lateral movement and judgment. Regular repetition of these drills not only boosts skill but also confidence.

As a coach, it is vital to remember that blaming a wicketkeeper for dropped balls or missed takes during a match is not productive if adequate training has not been provided beforehand. A good coach ensures that wicketkeeping drills are part of every session and that the keeper is developed with attention to skill, reaction, and posture correction.