

Backswing

Theory

It is vital that the head is kept still during the backswing to maintain balance, and also provide clear perception of the approaching ball. If the head and eyes are moving while trying to track the ball, it will be more difficult to predict the interception point between bat and ball - the brain has to take into account the movement of both the batter's head and body, as well as the ball.

By stepping forward or back, the batter increases the width of their base of support. This provides greater stability for the stroke.

The step should also move the body's mass towards the contact point - a key fundamental of efficient force generation.

The bat can be lifted above the stumps in height, but it is not acceptable to lift the bat too high or to finish with the hands away from the body. In particular, the hands and bat must not move out too far towards the off side, as this will compromise balance and stability. The bat should be drawn in close to the body and directly in line with the path of the ball.

The step should be co-ordinated with the backswing for balance in an efficient counter-balancing movement. On the front foot strokes, the movement of the front leg is counter balanced by the backswing of the bat. These initial movements performed in unison will assist the overall co-ordination of the stroke.

When stepping onto the back foot, the distance the batter steps is not as important as making sure that all of the body weight is supported by the back foot. In fact, the faster the bowler, the shorter the step. The notion of using the depth of the crease only applies to medium pace and slow bowlers. The advantage of a small step is that the batter will be able to prepare early to play the downswing and thus have maximum body support for the stroke. A large step against a fast bowler in fact reduces the time the batter has to play the downswing. Unless they can step back faster than the ball is approaching (up to 155 k.p.h.) the batter is at a disadvantage if they take a large step.

It is very important that the front shoulder rolls slightly **downwards** as the bat is lifted, so that a line drawn through both shoulder joints would point to the pitch in line with the expected impact point. This sets up the upper body levers to uncoil powerfully in the direction of the target.

Note that the backswing is **not** performed with just the hands. The shoulders, arms and bat pivot back as a unit. An imaginary line drawn up the front arm, along the shoulders, down the back arm to the bottom hand, and then down the bat, should form a figure "9." It is this "9" that rotates back as a unit. The top hand holds the bat firmly, while the last 3 fingers of the bottom hand come off the bat so that the hand is cocked and slightly open, with the palm away from the handle by the top of the backswing (the trigger grip.)

A good finishing position for the backswing would be along a line between the wicket keeper and second slip, with the hands close to the rear hip and the bat handle directly under the shoulders. The bat comes up closer to the back elbow, as the bottom hand is opened when the shoulders rotate in the backswing. This is a feature of many of the top batters in the world, who have relaxed hands at the top of the backswing (Sachin Tendulkar, Steve Waugh, Ricky Ponting, Belinda Clarke.) As their shoulders rotate, the bat folds in towards the bottom forearm in preparation for the generation of a maximum bat speed.

The step and the weight transfer should be completed before any other movements occur. In particular, the step should be completed before the bat moves forward in its downswing. In advanced skill batters, a time lapse of approximately 0.2 seconds in cricket, and 0.4 seconds in baseball occurs between contact with the ground with the front foot and the forward swing of the bat.

An efficient and aligned backswing and step is a crucial preparation phase that sets up a stable base for the aligned upper body levers (the shoulders, arms and hands,) to generate maximum bat speed and control in the direction of the ball and target.

In summary, the following key points should form the basis of effective coaching:

KEY POINTS - STEP AND BACKSWING

- Overall body position is side-on to the flight path of the ball.
- Foot, shoulders, arms and bat move in unison.
- Shoulders arms and bat aligned within the same plane.
- Bat moves back along a line between WK and 2nd slip.
- Hands and bat held in close to the body near the rear hip.
- Firm grip with "open" bottom hand, and wrists cocked.
- Both legs bent but stable after moving forward.
- Rear leg braced after moving back.
- Full sole of the weight supporting foot is kept in contact with the ground.
- Foot position allows space for bat to swing freely to the ball.

Error Correction

HANDS ON

The coach guides the batter through the backswing and step phase, focussing on the wrist release with the bottom hand, keeping the hands in close and the bat handle under the shoulders.

REHEARSAL

Top Hand Only

The step and swing phase is rehearsed with only the top hand on the bat handle.

Bottom Hand Only

The step and swing phase is rehearsed with only the bottom hand on the bat handle.

Both Hands

The step and swing phase is rehearsed with a normal grip.

PARTNER FEEDBACK

Hit The Hand

A partner holds one hand palm down at stump height in a line between the wicket keeper and second slip. The batter performs the step and backswing phase so that the bat hits their partner's hand in the backswing. This process is repeated until the partner's hand is