

CRICKET, AND HOW TO EXCEL IN IT.

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CHAPTER IV.—FIELDING.

Fielding, like batting and bowling, cannot be acquired without assiduous practice. Its importance is too often under-rated, and many people seem to fancy that there is nothing easier than to field properly, and that it does not so much matter if a team is rather weak in that department. A good fieldsmen who cannot bat at all is worth more in an eleven than an average batsman who cannot field—matches are won not only by the runs got, but by the runs saved.

A fieldsmen should be blessed with activity, strength and pluck—if he shrinks from or funks a ball he is sure to miss it—and above all things, he should always be on the alert and watch every ball that is bowled, never standing still with hands in pocket and eyes gazing on vacancy. He should not talk except when the wicket is down—there is nothing more demoralizing to good play or more annoying to some batsmen than to hear gossip more or less, principally less, amusing going on while the ball is being bowled. A batsman has quite enough to do to attend to the game.

In placing a field, always bear in mind that the men should be stood either close enough in to save a single, or as far out as they can go to save a two, and that when the ground is soft you can place them nearer to save the single than when it is hard, the reason being that when the ground is soft the ball rolls slowly, and fast runners can easily steal a run if the men are not pretty close in.

A great deal depends on the positions to which the different men are assigned, and on the varying play of the batsmen. Most batsmen have favourite strokes, and it is in the way in which these are noted and provided for that the efficiency of the field depends.

Not only should the fieldsmen watch every ball that is bowled, but they should particularly keep an eye on the batsman, so as to anticipate, if possible, where he means to hit the ball, and thus get a good start of it and save a run or two. The bowler also should be watched, especially by the out-fieldsmen, so that they can at once obey his signs when he wants them to change their positions to suit some particular manoeuvre.

Long-stopping is a capital school for general fielding; a man who can long-stop well can field anywhere. Practise catching; get, if you can, some one to hit high catches from the bat. It is astonishing what a difference there is in the way a catch comes off a bat from what it does from a throw. Throwing catches afford good practice, and it is a good plan at the fall of each wicket during a match to throw about a few, more especially to the out-fielders.

A good fielder does not stay for the ball to come to him, but hastens to meet it, and does not throw his arms about and threaten to throw the ball, but picks it up and dashes it in in one motion. He always tries at a catch if anywhere within a reasonable distance of him, and is never content to stand still and secure it on the long-hop if he can manage to run in before it touches the ground. No man can tell what balls it is possible to catch unless he tries at them.

"Throw straight at my nose!" Surrey Stephenson used to say, and no better advice could be given. The ball is thrown up by the field for the wicket-keeper to stop and put the wicket down with, if he can, and there is no object in fieldsmen taking shots at the wicket which do not hit it once in a hundred times. If, then, you are not far from the wicket, throw the ball direct into the wicket-keeper's hands, and do not allow it to touch the ground, as it may shoot or break back (and generally does) before it reaches him. Such a mode of return is often most dangerous, and is just as reprehensible as the foolish practice of hurling the ball wildly at the wicket-keeper or bowler when there is no chance of saving the run or running the men out.

A wicket-keeper wears gloves to protect his hands, a bowler does not; and as it is of importance that the bowler should not be hurt, the wicket-keeper should receive as many balls as possible, and fielders should never throw in to the bowler's wicket unless for some very good reason. Throw low and throw straight: the greater the curve the greater the time the ball takes to get to the wicket.

All out-fieldsmen should be good throwers and good runners; fast running with a quick start is a great advantage for fieldsmen, and is the cause of the saving of a multitude of runs. For quick starting you want a good foothold; it will never do to slip, and so spikes of some sort are requisite; there is plenty of choice as to variety, from ordinary hobnails upwards, but short spikes that screw into the boot are, I think, the best. Boots are better than shoes, especially for bowlers.

In catching always give with the ball. Swift catches are frequently made by men who apparently miff easy ones, because their hands

involuntarily give back with one and remain unmoved at the approach of the other, and the ball jumps out. Practise catching with either hand, but in a match always catch with the two hands if you can manage it; a ball with a twist on it is most difficult to hold with one hand, but can easily be caught by two.

If you happen to miss a catch, do not stop and look astonished, but scurry away after the ball and save the runs; a man can be forgiven for missing a catch occasionally, "such things happen in the best regulated" teams, and the best players will sometimes let the ball drop, but it is unpardonable for a man in the field after missing a catch to sheepishly pick up the ball after a lengthened pause, and then fling it in like a madman, as we often see done. He cannot possibly do any good, and he may do a great deal of harm.

The wicket-keeper should stand well up to his wicket, right leg forward and left back, a position in which he will find it easier to take the leg balls than in any other. He should always be on the look out and never tire, and should try and take every ball, and never think that a ball is going to be hit by the batsman, and give it up, as some wicket-keepers do. The one he does not attempt to take is almost sure by the law of contraries to be a chance and to be missed by his carelessness. He ought never to leave his wicket unless the ball rolls but a very little way from him; he should take every ball he can, and save the long-stop as much as possible, and always keep his wits clear and be ready to stump the batsman should he be out of his ground for a second. Men have been stumped out for lifting their right leg just to give a hitch to their trousers, for sitting on the grass to recover their wind and slipping hold of their bat handle during a sneeze, for twitching up the right foot in drawing a ball, and though these are refinements in the art of wicket-keeping, they serve to show that the man with the gloves should be wide awake. It is a good plan for the captain to keep wicket, and to direct his field by signs, as the batsman is then, unless very wary, kept in the dark as to their movements.

Longstop should stand just far enough back to save the run, and should have a very quick return. He should place himself a little to the leg side of the wicket, as, if a right-handed man, he will thus find it easier to stop the ball, the hand which is quickest being nearest its probable track. A ball coming to the right is easier stopped by the right hand than by the left, and the wicket-keeper is more likely to take the ball on the off side than on the leg. He should always be prepared for the ball being turned a little out of its course, keep his eye on it from the instant it leaves the bowler's hand, be ready for tips, draws, and snicks, and back up without the loss of a moment.

Short-slip has little running to do, hence he is generally the bowler at the end he stands at, for a bowler is useless if blown and unsteady. According to the speed of the bowling the position of short-slip will alter; for fast bowling he should go a good way back, because if he stands near, and the ball is snicked, it reaches and passes him before he can see it, and a catch is thus missed, which a few yards in the rear would have shot into his hands. For slow bowling he should stand nearer and squarer, as the ball will not reach him from off the edge of the bat if too far away. Short-slip should be one of the first to back up the wicket-keeper, and takes his place if he ever leaves his wicket.

Long-slip, or third man—who is, perhaps, rather a middle-slip, being long-slip placed in close enough to save the run—is one of the hardest places in the field to fill satisfactorily, as the ball, flying off the bat edge, takes a great deal of twist when it touches the ground, and is most likely to be missed unless you get well in front of it. Long-slip is expected to meet the ball, and to get it in quickly so as to save the run or take the wicket.

Point should be a sharp one to be of any use. He has to change his position for different styles of bowling, and get far out for fast bowling, close in for slow. He should follow every ball with his eye until it hits the bat, and spring forward and secure it if played anywhere near him. He should back up promptly at either wicket, be a sure catch with either hand, have an eye like an eagle, and stop the hard hits which would go for many runs as well to the right as to the left of him. If a bowler sends in the ball wildly he must keep away a little, but if the bowler is straight on the wicket he can stand close in and almost snap the ball off the bat.

(To be continued.)

THE UMPIRE

TREASURER.—We recommend Mr. Samuel B. Windrum, whose advertisement appears in another column.

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