

**ADVANCED FIELDING
TECHNIQUES FOR
LEVEL I COACHES**

TODAY'S ATHLETE TOMMOROW'S FIELDER

Thirty years ago AFL footballers who kicked with both feet were considered something of a freak and naturally gifted. Only by raising the levels of expectations on players are we at today's situation where the "one sided" player is a rather extraordinary exception rather than the norm of thirty years ago.

Cricket thinking unfortunately remains in this bygone era and the greatest handicap to the development of our game is the limitations our imagination places on today's athletes.

There is nothing more certain than the fact that the players of tomorrow will be able to make run out throws from within the ring from both sides. We need to encourage the athletes in our game and free our imagination and their ability to what is possible, not what is impossible.

MOVING IN WITH THE BOWLER

Like all preparation positions (the stance in batting for example), the number one priority is that the position does not commit the player to an action due to the position alone. Moving in with the bowler gives you momentum in a forward direction which is good, but too much forward momentum ie running, commits you to moving forward but retards effective movement to the side.

The game is generally played on the ground and therefore, I believe, a good preparation position for fielders in the ring is moving forward with short choppy steps in a slight crouch that allows the hands to hang close to the ground (the position where they are most likely to be required).

FIELDING POSITION

The basic fielding position for the ball hit toward the player is with the legs approximately shoulder width apart, knees bent, tail down, head up and arms fully extended in front of the body. The body remains at 90 degrees to the direction of the on coming ball (the opposite foot to the throwing arm may be slightly advanced) until it is fielded and then the throwing sequence begins (see CROW HOP).

The ball is received by the elbows retracting into the body slightly slower than the speed of the oncoming ball ("soft hands"). The ball is then brought back via the belly button and continues behind the body as the throwing sequence begins.

Remember, we are developing players to field in good conditions. The old knee down, "long barrier" is a capitulation to either a "ground keeper's error" or a skill error, one is beyond the players control and therefore not a worry, the other a weakness not to be tolerated and an area for further practice.

CROW HOP

The Crow Hop is the movement that transfers the fielder from the front on fielding position to the side on throwing position in the most efficient manner while developing momentum for the throw.

After receiving the ball in the fielding position, the fielder begins a sideways movement with the foot on the same side as the throwing arm (right foot for right handers) coming IN FRONT of the other and landing at 90 degrees to the direction of throw. The front foot comes through into a slightly open position allowing for rotation of the hips. The throwing sequence then begins. The greater distance of throw required, the longer and more powerful the Crow Hop. In the in-field of covers, mid-wicket etc., the Crow Hop is often little more than a shuffle of the feet to gain the correct direction for the throw. (See MOVING IN ON THE BALL #3, PICK UP, SHORT THROW.)

THROWING

The basic motion should be learned throwing for velocity. Where possible the ball should always be gripped across the seam.

The throwing arm should rotate from receiving the ball DOWN, BACK & UP, to a position where the arm is FULLY EXTENDED with the hand ON TOP of the ball.

The front arm is withdrawn into the side and the throwing arm, led by the elbow snaps from a wide position (hand wider than the elbow) across the body into the opposite back pocket. The arm rotates with the little finger finishing on top. The ball is released with backspin.

MOVING IN ON THE BALL

SHORTEST THROW TO LONGEST

1. UNDERARM

The crucial points in the underarm throw is that there should be:

- i. No bend in the arm
- ii. The fielder should stay at the same height throughout the action (do not stand up)
- iii. No back swing
- iv. If fielded one hand, the ball should be picked up next to the foot of the same hand. ie right foot for right handers. The step then incorporates the preparation for the throw.

NB: I prefer to see all moving balls fielded two hands as I believe it is little if any slower than using one hand, ensures a higher success rate and also prevents any back swing.

2. THROW OFF THE WRONG FOOT

This is a reasonably short distance throw fielding a slow hit ball while moving directly at the target at high speed. The forward speed is the factor that produces the momentum rather than correct mechanics. The throwing motion is the same as fielding to the throwing hand side as the foot opposite to the throwing arm comes across the body to retain the player's balance. The main coaching point is to maintain running stride.

MOVING IN ON THE BALL (cont.)

3. PICK UP, SHORT THROW (Short cover, short mid wicket)

This is a throw of short distance to a ball hit firmly and straight to the fielder. The ball is fielded in normal fielding position. There are two techniques of throw dependent on the direction of the target.

- A. To make a throw at the 'keepers end, the short cover receives the ball, shuffles his feet to re-align his hips (referred to as quick feet) and fires off a short quick throw with the ball only taken back to the ear as the throw does not require much power, rather a quick release (referred to as quick hands).
- B. To make a throw to the bowler's end, the (right handed) short cover receives the ball and drops his left knee towards the other leg without moving his feet. This has the effect of re-aligning the shoulders to allow a "quick hands" throw to the bowlers end.

4. PICK UP, CROW HOP AND THROW FOR VELOCITY

This is the basic throwing motion and is a combination of FIELDING POSITION, CROW HOP and THROWING above.

MOVING TO THE SIDE

5. FIELDING TO THE THROWING HAND SIDE

The ball is picked up in the throwing hand with the opposite foot forward (left foot for right handers). The arm goes back as the back foot lands. The foot opposite to the throwing arm swings across the body as the throwing arm comes through. The leg acts as a counter balance to keep the fielder stable. The fielder should be encouraged to keep running (similar to TECHNIQUE 2, THROW OFF THE WRONG FOOT) and not to stand up.

Because the fielder is moving to the side at speed and imparts side spin with the throw, the ball will actually travel in that direction after release. To counter this, the fielder should aim behind their target.

6. FIELDING TO THE NON THROWING HAND SIDE

If the ball can be received in front of the body, (this should always be encouraged) the crow hop or stationary hip turn (TECHNIQUE 3) is used to realign the hips to ensure they point in the direction of the throw. In order to assist with the hip turn, players are encouraged where possible to use a shallow semi circle behind the ball prior to fielding. This is called "rounding" on the ball. The harder the fielder runs early in the chase, the greater the opportunity to round on the ball, and therefore the better throw they can make.

MOVING TO THE SIDE (cont.)

7. FIELDING TO THE NON THROWING HAND SIDE (cont.)

This is generally a defensive position where the ball is struck so firmly to the non throwing side that it can not be fielded in front of the body. From this position, the fielder receives the ball, completes a turn, landing on the back foot (right foot for right handers) and releases the ball on the turn for throws of short distance, or then completes a crow hop for throws of distance. Because the ball is now behind the body it may be most effectively fielded by a slide turn throw to the non throwing hand side (TECHNIQUE 10).

GOING BACK ON THE BALL

SHORTEST THROW TO LONGEST

SLIDE TURN THROW

The value of the slide turn is in the speed with which the change of direction can be completed, not in the velocity of throw. It has two components, the slide and the throw. These should be taught separately before the whole skill is brought together.

THE SLIDE

The slide used is called a figure 4 slide (due to the shape formed by the legs in the slide) The player chases the ball and slides on the outside of the opposite leg to the throwing arm. This leg (the left leg for the right hander) is bent under the knee of the outstretched (right) leg to form a figure 4. The slide carries the fielder to the ball. The ball is fielded in front of the shin of the bent leg. As the ball is picked up, the extended knee pushes into the ground, stopping the backward movement. (TECHNIQUES 8 & 9).

Throws to the non throwing side are completed with figure 4 slides that see the leg positions reversed (ie right leg tucked under and left leg extended for a right handed fielder (TECHNIQUE 10).

8. SHORT DISTANCE SLIDE TURN THROW

This is the shorter and quicker of the two throws and is effective for short leg chasing back to effect a run out at the 'keepers end. As soon as the balance is gained, the short throw is fired off. The throw is completed from the knees. This is the quickest method of return but also develops the least throwing power due to the throw being delivered from the knees.

GOING BACK ON THE BALL(cont.)

9. INCREASED DISTANCE SLIDE TURN THROW

This allows a throw of greater power while still ensuring a quick turn. Upon receiving the ball, the fielder pushes the extended leg down which has the effect of returning him to his feet. He releases the ball as soon as he regains stability.

10. SLIDE TURN THROW TO THE NON THROWING HAND SIDE

This technique is used when the ball is hit past the fielder to his non throwing hand side. When the ball is picked up the extended leg (opposite to the throwing hand) is pushed into the ground and the fielder regains his standing position, completes a hip turn, plants the back foot and throws to the target.

Practice is required in the actual slide for the fielder to understand when to begin their slide in relation to the position and speed of the ball, and how best to use their speed to regain balance whilst not over balancing.

The key to this skill is the speed and efficiency of the turn, not the momentum developed for the throw. It is therefore a throw for short distances.

11. PICK UP & STATIONERY THROW

This is a throw for greater distance and therefore requires the development of greater momentum. The fielder runs to get the same foot as their throwing arm right foot for right handers) behind the ball. This places them in a side on position. They field the ball and without stepping, transfer momentum from moving backward to forward and throwing. It is a medium distance throw that enables a relatively quick turn, but a throw of greater velocity than the slide turn.

12. PICK UP, CROW HOP AND THROW

This is the form of throwing for development of greatest power. It is the throw generally used from close to the boundary.

The ball is collected in the same position as number 2 above, however once the ball is fielded, the player completes a crow hop and returns the ball.

GOING BACK ON THE BALL(cont.)

13. RELAY

This applies to throws on big grounds and not only is quicker than a loopy throw from the outfield, but also allows for poor throws to be corrected or throws to be redirected in the case of a mix up or a fall by the batsman.

- i. The first throw is to be the longest throw. The "cut off men" should only be 20-30 metres from the target.
- ii. When the ball is hit and a relay will be required, the cut off men run to their position ensuring a straight line between the thrower, them and the target. Cut off number two stands 5 metres behind the first man for the awkward, short hop throw or the overthrown initial return.
- iii. The front cut off man should have both hands in the air and be calling for the relay well before the fielder reaches the ball.
- iv. The fielder makes their best throw aiming to hit the top of the cut off man's head. (An over strong throw will be taken by cut off number two or will go straight through to the target.)
- v. Once the ball is released the cut off man turns to a side on position. They initiate their crow hop as the ball is arriving ensuring quick hands and quick feet to deliver the ball to the target as quickly as possible.
- vi. This first cut off man makes the decision to take the throw or otherwise. If the throw is awkward and will be easier taken by number two cut off, number one will leave it to ensure a quality, errorless relay. Therefore, cut off number two must be expecting to receive every throw and make appropriate position.
- vii. The player controlling the target (the WK or the player at the bowlers end) is in complete control as to the actions of the relay man, ie to "relay", "leave it", "keeper's end" or "bowler's end" as appropriate.

MOVING BACK ON THE HIGH CATCH

If a catch is hit over the fielder's head, it is important for the fielder to get into a position that will allow them to (1) move at top pace and (2) keep their eyes on the ball. It is called the Drop Step.

From the front on position, the player drops the same foot back as the side to which the ball has gone i.e. if the ball has gone over the right shoulder, the fielder drops their right foot back. This quickly achieves a position from which they can begin running. If the player has misjudged the ball, or it has swirled in the wind, the player turns while keeping their eyes on the ball.

WHEN TO USE WHICH TECHNIQUE

(ASSUMES RIGHT HAND FIELDER)

