MENTAL APPROACH TO CRICKET

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Batting

Unless you open the batting you have only two minutes warning before you are due at the crease. In two minutes there is very little time to do anything other than gather together equipment and be on the way to the crease. If you are to be in the best frame of mind when you arrive at the wicket then the bulk of your physical and mental preparation needs to be done well in advance of your turn to bat.

The first requirement of batting is to adjust to the light, pitch and bowling as quickly as possible. This requires calmness and good observational skills, coupled with a sound defence. With this approach you can markedly increase your chances of surviving the difficult first few minutes of an innings. After that run making becomes more a case of self control, technique and strategy.

Good batsmen have the ability to “play within themselves”. This may mean playing at perhaps fifty percent of full capacity and selecting shots that minimise the risk of being dismissed. Good players are successful because they can discipline their natural urges over long periods.

Emotions can be the undoing of any batsman; therefore consistently good players control their feelings. Some of these feelings experienced are:

**Nervousness**
- Prior to batting.
- Early in an innings.
- Nearing a personal best score.
- In the nineties.
- Tense match position.

**Frustration**
- Not scoring quickly.
- A poor bowler has you struggling.
- Slow pitch and ball not coming onto bat.
- Batting partner keeps taking a single off the last ball of an over.
- Batting partner not reading a match situation correctly.

**Fatigue**
- Running many threes and fours.
- Poor physical preparation.
- Too much tension.
- Batting against good bowling for some time.
- Extremes of heat.

Self-confidence or belief in your own ability has a major impact on your cricket performance

The confident batsman will plan how to succeed and will set out to achieve his goals. The less confident player will play conservatively and try to avoid failing. Preparation will assist you greatly in building your self-confidence.

The psychological skill that is more important than any other in batting is concentration

Batsmen need to focus intently when they are on strike, starting from about the time the bowler begins his run-up until the ball is dead. The ability to focus intently and then relax is an art that can be learnt and practised. Batsmen in good form will be able to effortlessly shift their focus from their game plan, to the bowler, the ball, the fielders and their partner and so on. Without concentration you will not be able to cope with the demands of batting for any length of time.

Concentration is the ability not to be distracted by thoughts, fielders or unfamiliar surroundings. The use of specific breathing techniques and practising your batting at training while players are walking behind the bowler or trying to distract you can be useful.
Good concentration comes from being well prepared, in control, and focused on what is happening at the moment. The ability to relax and refocus after a disruption such as a poor shot is vitally important in building an innings.

To achieve your full batting potential requires motivation, concentration, confidence, self-control, and an understanding of tactics. Improvement in these areas will lead to greater consistency, bigger scores and a greater enjoyment of the game.

**Bowling**

It is the bowler who initiates the action of the batsman. This means as a bowler you have the first opportunity to influence what happens in the game. Success as a bowler requires motivation, determination and a high level of fitness.

Good bowlers regularly assess their strengths and weaknesses and then set goals to improve any area of weakness. To be a good bowler will require you putting in many hours in the nets to perfect the craft.

Bowling can be exciting, satisfying or downright frustrating. There is no room in good teams for bowlers who cannot control their emotions. Tensions or loss of control affects rhythm, accuracy, the ability to swing or spin the ball, and to think clearly.

Emotions can be the undoing of any bowler; therefore consistently good players control their feelings. Three of the most common feelings experienced are:

**Tension**
- First over of a spell.
- Limited overs game.
- Bowling to a very good player.
- A close game.

**Frustration**
- Can’t get a batsman out.
- Bowling from the wrong end.
- Best deliveries aren’t getting the edges.
- Dropped chances and misfields.

**Fatigue**
- Bowling into the wind.
- Long spells.
- Not physically fit.
- Not relaxing between overs.
- Fielding.

A strong sense of self-confidence is important for a bowler because the rewards for bowling do not always come as you expect. Your best ball can be hit for six, the pitch can be flat and unresponsive, other bowlers can take wickets bowling rubbish and so on. Bowlers should develop a belief that they will be rewarded for persistence.

To achieve consistent success as a bowler you need to apply the same concentration to bowling as batsmen do to their batting.

Study the batsmen, develop a plan and then bowl to that plan. Apply a well-developed routine before you bowl and during an innings.

Bowlers need to plan their delivery then focus on delivering the ball. You can relax your focus between deliveries when fielding, and when not bowling. As a bowler you should shift your focus from your strategies, to the ball, to the batsman, to the target, to your body position or feeling and so on. The ability to relax and refocus after a poor delivery is important.

Good concentration comes from being well prepared, in control, and focused on what is happening at the moment.
Fielding

When a team with bowlers who bowl good line and length is backed up by fielders who hold their catches, excel in ground fielding and return the ball quickly and accurately, they place a great deal of pressure on the batting side. For this reason, fielding can make a difference between winning and losing.

The first psychological battle for fielders is their lack of interest in the task itself.

Non-bowlers are often the keenest fielders and make the task of fielding as challenging and enjoyable as possible by setting themselves high standards on the field. Bowlers often have a strong preference for bowling all day from one end and resting while someone else bowls from the opposite end.

Successful fielding, like all cricket activities, requires a large amount of practice, together with the ability to switch concentration on and off.

For the slip fielder it means being able to focus on the bat as the bowler is about to deliver, and being in a state of mind to catch the ball should the ball find the edge or fly nearby. For the midfield positions like the covers, square leg, mid-off, the demands are to prevent singles, cut off potential boundaries, chase the balls hit through the infield and return them accurately, take catches, and back up throws from the other side of the wicket.

The ability to switch concentration on and off has a lot to do with the routines or rituals that good fielders practise and employ in games.

The routine that you employ may vary during a day's play but the key for fielders is to be alert for catches and opportunities in the field. Fielders, like wicket-keepers, can have their confidence shattered by dropping a catch. When this happens it is crucial that you put it behind you and get on with making the most of the next opportunity.

Wicket Keeping

Most cricket teams are made up of possibly, five batsmen, four bowlers, one all-rounder and one wicketkeeper. This highlights one of the immediate pressures faced by wicket keepers, in that there are limited opportunities. Taking this situation one step further you can see that often at a club the fourth best batsman plays for the first team when the fourth best keeper could play for the fourth team.

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the wicket keeper because, like good umpires, a good keeper will often go unnoticed. Bowlers are in a good position to judge the value of the keeper.

A good keeper has the ability to bring the best out of the bowler, by not only taking the catches and stumping opportunities but by encouraging and advising the bowler, organising the field and providing valuable input to the captain.

Like batting and bowling, the keeper should understand his own game. It is important to know how well you are performing during a match. This means recognising any weak areas and as much as possible changing these while out on the field.

It is vital to your team's fielding effort that as a keeper you concentrate on every ball. A good keeper knows that his errors will reflect badly on the whole fielding effort. Keeping wickets efficiently will require the ability to switch on concentration when the bowler runs in and maintaining full alertness until the ball has been played and become dead. Relax between deliveries and between overs so that you can maintain a good level of concentration throughout an innings.

Emotions can also play an important part in “keeping performance” and your work will require steadiness and a calmness that will enable you to be controlled rather than hyped up. It is also important that you put any feeling of disappointment aside if you have missed a catch, stumping or run out opportunity. The ability to focus totally on the next delivery is crucial to your performance.

A good wicketkeeper will bring to their task a sound set of skills, supported by motivation, concentration, self-awareness and a love for their sport. By developing these psychological areas you can maximise your performance and contribution to the team.