

# **FAST BALL PHILOSOPHIES & STRATEGIES**



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Let me begin by saying I'm not a professional by any stretch of the imagination hence the self-portrait, but I will admit to being very passionate and learned about this most glorious of games, Cricket! In general terms many expatriates see the game as an opportunity to play some relaxing Cricket on a weekend and if they could play club ball for the next 10 or 20 years they wouldn't mind one bit. They are not interested in promoting the game or seeing the game grow. Not that this is necessarily a bad thing, it's just that I tend to view Cricket in Utah as a much bigger project and have a vision of Utah High Schools playing Hardball Cricket in State tournaments some day, along with even Collegiate play between Colleges. Especially community leagues where adults and kids alike are playing on a regular basis! However, when the discussion comes up regarding a shorter format version of Cricket. I inevitably am hit with the same questions from expatriates who follow and or played Cricket in their countries. The following is an attempt to list those comments with my response and philosophies. So first some Q & A regarding my philosophies then next, I will attempt to explain the strategies and or motivation that characterize a shorter format of Cricket.

**Question/Statement** - *Won't the game just be a slugfest? Just slashing at the ball all the time is not true Cricket.*

**Answer/Response** - England is facing increasing public pressure to make the ovals in County Cricket profitable. Some ovals are even facing the possible closure of their facilities if the situation is not rectified. Even many of the Southwest Asian countries are facing similar problems. Pakistan does not use a structure similar to England where teams represent public areas such as cities or district but rather large corporations sponsor the teams for their local first class leagues. However, the local level games are not very well attended and as a consequence the national board is struggling with reasons as to why and solutions to fix the problem. While New Zealand and Australia have batted around a variation known as Cricket Max since 1998 in an attempt to bring the game into a consumable chunk of time for commercial broadcasting and spectator convenience that version has met with little international interest and has faded.

With the advent of English County Twenty20 Cup tournaments and their resounding success a shortened version of Cricket is becoming more acceptable and the international interest and success has been equally surprising. Each time Cricket's format changes, traditionalists challenge it. Just as the ODI was considered an outlaw and ridiculous game when it first made it's appearance in the late 70's so will the 20 over match make it's way into the hearts and minds of Cricketers world wide.

Bottom line is, the ODI format created a revolution in Cricket with Sixers, and Fours being belted all over the place with fantastic catches and super fast bowlers, etc. The Cricket loving fans went NUTS over the action. It was a bonefied slugfest! It's what the fans want and will pay for more importantly! It's a difference in perception, It's the action that Cricket can offer, especially when compared to baseball for both expatriates and main stream Americans. Baseball has for the last 10 years faced similar problems in spectator activity and decline. Cricket is primed to make some serious inroads, but ONLY in a shortened format. Cricket has so much to offer the fan and participant especially youth participants. Character, Teamwork, Leadership and Courage are values to just name a few that Cricket can offer our youth. Increasing the sports acceptance in this country is the other overarching factor as I see it. We must be willing to modify the game we love to make sure we can pass it down to our kids and other to enjoy.

**Question/Statement** – *As team captain I can tell you my batters won't go for this format. They need at least 5 overs to get comfortable and how can you be expected to build an innings with this format. Besides my players all want to bat and bowl in an afternoon, how can I do that with this format.*

**Answer/Response** – Again it is a matter of perception. It is traditional to do as most expatriates are taught; and that is to *build an innings*. Some of your better batters may view this format as cutting their batting off before they even get started. While others who are farther down the batting order may view this format as blocking them from even getting to bat! IN REALITY, NEITHER IS TRUE!

Yes, this game is devoted to building *fan base* and *broadening* the sport among American mainstream sportsmen and women. But the simple fact is this (**the team is up to bat NOT the individual batter**). When Americans view Cricket they are always asking “When does the *other team get to bat?*” For Americans it’s a TEAM THING! The pressure for bowlers to bowl “change ups” rather than just be a specialist spin, or fast bowler increases dynamically. The pressure for batsman to play shots that score runs is tremendous or else a single batsman can run your squad into the ground very fast. For youth and club play it is suggested each batter is retired at 25 runs and the line up is rotated between innings. A good batter will have a chance to hit his 25 runs and then the captain will rotate the next batsman up. This is good for the sport in America. In many instances the good batters will be able to rotate back in during the 2<sup>nd</sup> innings for another crack at an additional 25 runs.

**Question/Statement** – *This game is too fast. When batters slug and slash and fielders throw themselves around in desperate attempts to catch the ball people get hurt and we do this just for recreational pleasure. We want to enjoy an afternoon of Cricket.*

**Answer/Response** – This statement is the best example of misperceptions and the difference in the way expatriates and mainstream Americans view sports. **FORMAT IS NOT WHAT GETS PEOPLE HURT; IT’S THE LEVEL OF COMPETITION AT WHICH THE GAME IS PLAYED!** Whether its basketball, football, etc. people play the same format at varying levels of competitiveness. If your club is looking for an afternoon away from the pressures of work and family then the game is approached in that manner. If two clubs meet head on in an all out match to take the state title, the competitiveness will be intense! My junior team plays on one level and the adults on another. But the format is still the same!

## **STRATEGIES**

### **BATTING**

- ✓ Cricket has so much more action than baseball, if the batters can see themselves as a team member rather than a single batter and view their personal accomplishments and skill in light of the following
  - o The captain’s goal should be to get as many batters to **“A Quarter Pounder!”** (25 runs) as possible. (for youth or club play at 25 runs the batter can retire his/her innings)
  - o Each batter should be striving to get **“A Quarter Pounder!”** as **fast as possible!**
  - o Ultimately a batter should strive to achieve a **half-century** by the second innings!
  - o Team captains will find success and an **e’spree decor** that is rare in Cricket!
- ✓ Captains should be aware and watching for batters’ who are **burning up** your overs.
- ✓ At the same time the captain must **strike a balance** between pushing teammates to hard to get their 25 runs and wickets falling faster than the pace of the 10 overs. But remember the more **quarter pounders** the more difficult the target becomes. The strategies will play out like a huge chess game as fielding captains and batting captains plot and use different tactics upon each other making for a wonderful display of Cricket! This is the hardest part to understand when expatriates are used to longer time periods.
- ✓ In the end the team’s line-up is rotated much quicker and everyone gets a piece of the action **as a team!**

### **BOWLING**

- ✓ Bowling strategies for the most part can will change as bowlers struggle with the pressure the batsman will put on them to achieve runs. Emphasis needs to be on change-ups and bowling a variety of swingers and spins.
- ✓ Basically pace and spin to keep the batsmen off guard and going for the wickets and pop-ups.

### **FIELDING**

- ✓ The one exception would be the ball is not dead once the wicket is busted and the opposing wicket is still open. The ball is only dead once the second batter makes his ground. The idea here is to create the potential (no-matter how unlikely) for a double play. I would in-vision this occurring with a wicket keeper catching a fielded ball and quickly throwing to bust the opposite wicket. This has the potential for some extremely exciting Cricket!