

EXTRAS TIPS FROM THE TOP



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Mopping up the tail



When the tail wags, bowlers and fielders

despair. Ian Pont, Essex's bowling coach, explains how to blast, tease or confuse those last few batsmen out

Interview by Edward Craig

THERE ARE two types of tailender – the swinger and the stonewaller. Darren Gough is a swinger, he'll play some shots. Matthew Hoggard **above** is a stonewaller. He blocks up an end and eats up time, which can do as much damage as someone scoring 50. This is the tailender I worry about. While they won't dominate, they have half-decent defences and will hang around. Tailenders have a habit of missing wide balls and hitting straight ones, so you have to think about how to dismiss them and you must take them seriously.

The most reliable way to dismiss a lower-order player is to bowl as full and straight as possible. Get the fast bowlers on and bazooka some yorkers in. But don't get frustrated if this doesn't work. If it is a flat wicket and the player is prodding forward, it is tough. A fast bowler can get annoyed and end up bowling

bouncers, which are ineffective.

But you can try different tactics – bowl lots of short balls then pitch one up. Many players suffer from the power of the preceding delivery: if you have bowled one around their ears they are thinking about that while the next one is coming down. You can set them up to play a shot they don't want to.

If you have a tailender slogging at the end, mix it up as if you are playing the last five overs of a limited-overs game. Most tailenders who are having a swing are looking to hit over mid-wicket, so stick a fielder out there. You do get the odd player who can hook and they are dangerous, like Gough. You have to be careful with that type of player because although he's not going to score runs regularly, he might come in at Nos.9, 10, and 11 and start bashing the ball around. If they

have played a few shots, put a fielder at deep-backward square leg and see if they will take him on – these are the sorts of things you have to try.

You also have to think about the nature of the tailender. Does the player bat down the order because they are poor or because the players in front of them are better? Alex Tudor bats No.10 for Essex but last year scored 144 in the Championship. Even in amateur cricket, there are few genuine No.11s these days.

Most lower-order players will not move their feet well and it is hard to get an edge. They won't get in line so they hang the bat outside off stump and it is pot-luck if it finds the edge. Bowlers can bowl beautiful deliveries that keep beating the bat. You can bowl too well at a tailender by bowling the wrong length. If you bowl back of a length to a top-order batsman, they might come at the ball hard and nick it. The same ball will miss the tailend blade by two or three inches. It looks great on TV but doesn't get them out. You need to bowl fuller and get them driving. Most lower-order players will have their poles knocked over or will slice the ball in the air from front foot shots.

As a last resort, you can always bring on a non-bowler. At Essex, we'd use someone like Alastair Cook, for a change, to break the stonewaller's concentration. But it is admitting defeat – you are saying that your main bowlers can't do it. The golden rule is to bowl straight: if you beat the bat, you must hit the stumps.

Ian Pont is Essex's bowling coach and the author of *The Fast Bowler's Bible*

Five ways to stop the tail wagging

- Bowl straight, but if you drift too straight, they'll slog you over mid-wicket
- Set the correct field in the obvious areas they are trying to hit
- Variety, slower balls, yorkers, change your length
- Don't be afraid to bowl short stuff, stick a short-leg in and see if they can cope
- Be patient