

The *Speed* Merchant

People claim he's the Guru of speed and accuracy. His methods are easy to understand, hard to disagree with and certainly unique in cricket circles. So it's no wonder people are turning to specialist bowling coach Ian Pont for guidance and help.

Pont is the former Essex fast bowler renowned for his awesome throwing arm. He almost made it to the Big Leagues in the States as a baseball pitcher during the 1980's in an audacious bid to switch codes. Pitching at speeds around 100 mph, he discovered the biomechanics of the body and adapted it to fast bowling. And now this massive man shares the knowledge with those seeking the holy grail of fast bowling – speed and accuracy.

"His methods are so different"
– Darren Gough

Among the converts is England legend, Darren Gough. At 35, he has been around and heard it all. But he's not met anyone like Pont. "His methods are so different",

Gough said. "By changing my front arm position, I've added a yard of pace and continued to bowl as accurately as ever. He uses a different language to any other coach I've ever met. And he's not afraid to suggest changes to actions".

Both Warwickshire and Kent have worked with Pont. John Inverarity, the former Australian Test cricketer, now coach at Edgbaston, described Pont as 'quite amazing'. But County Clubs have standard bowling coaches already, so are sticking with traditional methods that have met with limited success. Pont understands why they play safe but hopes for a more open-minded approach.

Pont says, "You must be able to measure improvement. That's why I work with a speed gun and do accuracy training. It's easy to coach if no one is actually quantifying what you do. I believe that many coaches don't really understand the principles of how the body works. That means it's harder for them to improve bowlers. When they try, it's using tired, old language that's uninspiring or simply learnt from a book". And it's this language that's new. For Pont has taken highly advanced

biomechanics and broken it down into bite sized pieces. He claims even 11 year olds can now understand it. Which means the future of bowling may well be in the hands of this coaching wizard. If the kids can get to grips with this new wave of coaching, standards will surely improve.

"It's about trust", Pont said. "Trusting yourself to try new things, experiment and break the mould. It's a fun learning environment too. When you make it new and exciting for people, they profit greatly".

Now I understand the 'how and why'
– Alex Tudor

Alex Tudor is another Test bowler to have come under Pont's direction. The former Surrey man is on a new lease of life with Essex and said, "I've felt as good as ever this season thanks to Ian's suggestions about holding on to the ball longer. Plus I didn't realise my feet weren't lining up my hips properly. Now I understand the 'how and why' of fast bowling in a way I didn't before". Tudor reports extra speed and accuracy to go with his new-found enthusiasm for



Ian Pont with Andre Adams

cricket after a series of crippling knee injuries. Pont's recognition is coming thick and fast. As Ronnie Irani's bowling coach, he travelled to the 2003 World Cup where Irani increased his speed from a lowly 68 mph to a lively 80 mph. Irani, now Essex captain, said, "I wish I could have had Ian as my coach when I was younger. He came too late for my career, but not for others". Irani then consequently appointed Pont as specialist bowling coach to the Club in March 2005. He continues to work his magic with the fresh young faces and senior bowlers alike.

South African Test bowler Dale Steyn admits he's not heard anyone say the things Pont does about the bowling action. "Ian is the first and only coach to ever focus on speed and accuracy. It's so exciting to hear it", he said. "We've discussed it and feel I can add 5-8 kph (3-5 mph) as I am at the moment. I was clocked at 151 kph (95

mph) so this is an incredible opportunity for me". The secret to the coaching is adjusting the body position between the bowling crease lines in a series of key indicator points. By lining up the body for a complete muscle stretch and contraction, extra pace and accuracy can be achieved consistently. Pont's coaching takes account of feet positions, hip drive, chest drive, arm pull and shoulder rotation, plus a host of other important set up issues 'that act as triggers'.

"He's a great guy, always positive"
– Andy Flower

Former Zimbabwe captain Andy Flower, is very impressed with Pont. "He's a great guy, always positive and has a way to coach bowlers that's

unique. This makes him a useful asset to have on board at any level". And Kiwi star Andre Adams agrees. The New Zealand all-rounder has learned a great deal in just a few months. "Ian picks up things about bowling others don't see. Then he puts the information across differently so improvements are made quickly. It's such a deep and lasting level of coaching", he said.

The plaudits continue to flow. Yet Pont takes it all in his stride. After more than 10 years of working with players of all abilities he's almost waiting for the world to play catch up. "Tradition tends to get in the way of coaching sometimes", Pont said. "Whilst we must not forget the basics of bowling such as line and length, wrist position and movement, we can enhance learning with these new techniques in a way never thought possible. And once the bowler discovers the truth for himself, he can absorb information like a sponge. It's a wonderful journey".



Ian Pont with Graham Napier



Below: Just a small selection of Ian's ever growing fan base.

(From Left to Right) Darren Gough, Alex Tudor, Andre Adams, Andy Flower.