

Cricket

99.94 Tips to Improve Your Game

Winning advice from
the game's premier
players and coaches

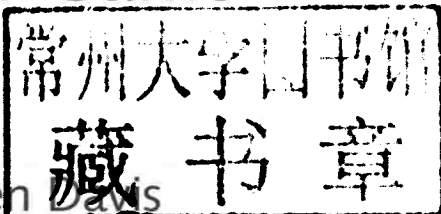
Foreword by
Merv Hughes



Ken Davis • Neil Buszard

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Your Game



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Human Kinetics

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davis, Ken, 1946-

Cricket : 99.94 tips to improve your game / Ken Davis and Neil Buszard.
p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-9078-0 (soft cover)

ISBN-10: 0-7360-9078-9 (soft cover)

I. Cricket--Training. I. Buszard, Neil, 1953- II. Title.

GV917.D38 2011

796.358--dc22

2010052854

ISBN-10: 0-7360-9078-9 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-9078-0 (print)

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The players' statistics cited in this text can be found at www.espnccricinfo.com and were current as of March, 2011.

Acquisitions Editor: Peter Murphy; **Developmental Editor:** Anne Hall; **Assistant Editor:** Tyler Wolpert; **Copyeditor:** Joy Wotherspoon; **Graphic Designer:** Joe Buck; **Graphic Artist:** Julie L. Denzer; **Cover Designer:** Keith Blomberg; **Photographer (cover):** Hamish Blair/Getty Images; **Printer:** Versa Press

Human Kinetics books are available at special discounts for bulk purchase. Special editions or book excerpts can also be created to specification. For details, contact the Special Sales Manager at Human Kinetics.

Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper in this book is certified under a sustainable forestry program.

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Foreword

Sir Donald (Don) Bradman and the figure 99.94 are well entrenched in cricket folklore and synonymous with each other. Bradman is statistically the greatest cricketer to ever play the game. His batting average of 99.94 is still almost twice as good as anyone else who has played Test cricket. Therefore, it makes sense that a book written about cricket for coaches and players should include 99 chapters.

Neil Buszard and Ken Davis have been playing and coaching cricket for the past 40 years. As leaders in the game, they challenge convention to create better players and a better game.

This book is not a typical instructional manual. It is filled with a variety of views and strategies to help both athletes and coaches improve their game. It provides useful tips and generates critical thinking. For some, the points will merely crystallize thoughts. For others, they may open minds to a much broader appreciation of the game than just the basics.

If you are looking for the edge on your competitors or you are in need of some inspiration, *Cricket: 99.94 Tips to Improve Your Game* might be just the catalyst you are seeking.

Merv Hughes

Sir Donald Bradman								
	Matches	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	100s	50s	Catches
Tests	52	80	6996	334	99.94	29		

Acknowledgments

To my mum, Lorna; and dad, Ken; who nurtured my love for sport and encouraged me throughout my career.

To my children, Rhett, Brooke, and Ben, who inspired me to appreciate the value and fascination of the written word.

To the late George Tribe, who introduced me to the science and art of cricket. His wisdom and smiling face always greeted me after a hot day in the field chasing leather.

To Brian Nettleton, my lecturer at Melbourne University, who showed me how to think creatively about teaching and coaching.

To my brother, Barry, who is a model sportsman, teacher, and a deep thinker about all the sport we have played together. A champion to me and others he has taught and coached.

To all the clubs that showed faith in me as a coach, to the players and colleagues who have provided the environment for me to discover and apply many of the ideas expressed in this book, I am eternally grateful.

To all the team-mates and opponents I've worked with, who have contributed to the lessons I've learned and to a lifetime of wonderful memories.

Ken Davis

To my mum, Gladys; dad, Ernie; and brother, Ian; who have encouraged and supported my love of sport.

To my wife, Liz, who has had to endure the highs and lows of playing and coaching—but has always supported my endeavours.

To my sons, Peter and Tim, who share my passion of sport and inspire others with their dedication to their individual pursuits.

To George Murray and Keith Stackpole, my senior cricket coaches, and Lyn Straw and David Went, my senior baseball coaches, who nurtured my skills and who, in their own ways, provided the foundation for my sporting career.

To Frank Pyke and Peter Spence, of the Victorian Institute of Sport, who helped to develop my coaching philosophy and enhance my personal growth.

To every team-mate, assistant coach, sports scientist and administrative assistant who shared their passion of sport and helped me achieve success.

Neil Buszard

Introduction

This book explores aspects of playing and coaching cricket that do not typically appear in how-to books on the game. Therefore, you will not find much content about the techniques involved in the myriad of batting strokes in a batter's repertoire. You won't learn how to bowl an outswinger, leg-spinner, off-cutter, or even a doosra. However, there is something here for both the elite player and the grass-roots cricketer.

In order to consistently play cricket well, a strong foundation of fundamental skills that will stand up under pressure is needed. However, you must couple this skill with an ever-expanding understanding of the nuances of the game. For instance, you need tactical sense, a focused mind, and the ability to adapt to any situation that confronts you. In short, go beyond the basics in order to excel in the competitive world of cricket.

Through our years of playing, coaching, and learning about cricket, we have gathered insights from a number of sources that can benefit players and coaches alike. We have gained wisdom from fellow players, athletes we have coached, and most importantly, the sport-science researchers with whom we have been involved. This information can set you on the path to cricket excellence. If you follow the concepts outlined in this book, we have no doubt that you will become a better player or coach. We hope your thinking about the sport is challenged and your performance and appreciation of the game is enhanced.

You can pick this book up at any time and read a couple of points. Some tips are longer than others, which reflects both a fundamental difference in our writing styles and the very nature of the game. Some overs take longer than others, some outfielders run more than the slip cordon, and some batters sprint distances that vary from 20 to 60 metres when scoring. Be prepared for diversity!

Our original intent was to compile a century of cricket tips, but we changed that when we thought of the man who took cricket performance to levels that have never been, and probably never will be, emulated. Sir Don Bradman's Test-batting average of 99.94 seemed an apt figure on which to model the number of chapters. We did not see Bradman play, but we have marvelled at his dominance of opposition

attacks. His footwork and attacking all-round game would no doubt have allowed him to excel in any era. He is simply the pinnacle of batting craft.

We trust you will enjoy reading the book, whether on the train to work or in the comfort of your own home. We guarantee that heeding the advice will give you as much enjoyment and satisfaction as we get from the game that has meant so much.

Key: Abbreviations used in statistical tables

Abbreviation	Explanation
HS	Highest score—The highest score an individual has made in a particular format of the game
ODI	One day international—A game played between two countries and consisting of 50 overs per side
ListA	One day games—Limited over games played between first class teams
Twenty20	Twenty over games—Games of 20 overs per side
NO	Not out—An innings played by a batter whereby they were not dismissed
Econ	Economy—The average amount of runs conceded per over bowled
Wkts	Wickets—The number of dismissals a bowler takes
5Wkts	5 wickets in an innings—The number of times a bowler takes 5 or more wickets in an innings
BT Ave	The average (batting)—The average of runs made against innings played
BW Ave	The average (bowling)—The average runs made against the wicket taken

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Batting

Batting in cricket is both an art and a science. Artistic players like Brian Lara and Mahela Jayawardene enthrall crowds with their graceful movement and exquisite handwork as they thread the ball through the fielder's net. In contrast, scientific batters like Simon Katich and Justin Langer study the type of delivery and field placements to determine the most efficient way of scoring runs within their repertoire of skills. In reality, most elite batters use a measure of both art and science.

Batting caters for the power player and the deflector. Cameron White and Kevin Pietersen brutalise the ball with raw aggression, whilst Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar caress the ball with sweet timing and deft placement. Since every player has to bat, a category of batters who might be best described as *agricultural* or *survivors* usually occupy the tail end of the innings. Their role is either to stoutly defend in support of a more-recognised batter or to swing the bat with abandon, scoring as many runs as they can in their short batting time.

Given the previously mentioned range of possible roles and styles of batting, it is little wonder that batting challenges the mind like few other sporting skills can. It provides a unique range of involvement that allows the batter to experience extreme emotional highs and lows. In most bat-and-ball sports, even after a poor performance, players have a chance to redeem themselves immediately. A baseball player strikes out and waits for eight other batters to perform before getting another chance. A tennis player loses 6-0 and serves 20 double faults but then gets to start afresh in the second set. In contrast, a cricket batter might only get to face one delivery before being dismissed from batting for the rest of the day.

However, little doubt exists that batting highs are memorable experiences. There are few better feelings in sport than making a big score under pressure. You have experienced the satisfaction of mastering an attack with immense concentration and have more than likely felt the

wonderful joy that ripples through your body when a scorching drive off the sweet spot of the bat pierces the field and races to the boundary. Batters of all levels can recall such experiences vividly even when their careers are long over. Simply put, batting can be great or miserable! We hope this section gives you more chances to achieve batting highs.

Certain aspects of batting are considered essential. Sound technique enables the bat to meet the ball in the most efficient manner; good balance and footwork help you assume the correct position for playing an array of shots, and concise decision making ensures that the correct shot is played to the ball being bowled. These essentials have been previously covered in a structured manner through many of books and DVDs. This book deliberately avoids the basics. Instead, we highlight the areas of batting that are commonly forgotten or are simply misunderstood.

In this section, the art of batting is taken to another level as we uncover the secrets of being successful. It tells how one of the best one-day players of all time used the wind to his advantage. It provides a method for playing spin bowling, outlines guidance for running between wickets, and uncovers the danger signs for batters in the search for batting excellence; plus there are additional tips on preparing and starting innings, choosing placement, and creating innovative strategies. Making runs is the aim of all batters. By following the 20 points in this chapter, you just might be on the way to improving your own score.

Starting an Innings

Although every batter in the world is most susceptible at the start of innings, we rarely practice for it. Sir Don Bradman was a master at scoring a single from the first ball he faced. He was keen to get his innings underway.

Sachin Tendulkar and Jacques Kallis are also very good at starting their innings. They are both quick to pounce on anything overpitched or short, but are very watchful with anything just outside off stump. In fact, the ability to leave the ball pitched in the corridor of uncertainty (just outside off stump on a good length) is a skill in itself that should be practised whenever possible.

Another worthwhile strategy for the start of an innings is to play within the V. Play with a relatively straight bat and avoid shots that are square of the wicket. As a general rule, you should always be ready to score runs, whether you are facing the first ball or the 100th ball. The only difference is the mindset you take to the crease. If you are nervous, frightened of failing, or wayward in your thoughts, then you are not ready to start your innings. On the other hand, if you are comfortable with your preparation, confident in your ability, and mentally focused, then you are in the right frame of mind to begin.

Often it is best to maintain one key thought as you stride to the wicket. This thought varies from player to player. Some prefer to be conscious of getting right behind the ball, whilst others will remind themselves to get their feet moving. The key is finding the mental cue that suits you. This comes from training and playing as often as you can.

Consider a good putter in golf, who stands over the ball, analyses the line, and backs himself to make the putt. When you start your innings, back yourself to play the right shot at the right time. You just might surprise yourself with a very positive start and a long innings.

Seeing Off the New Ball

Former Indian star Sunil Gavaskar maintained that the first hour of a Test match was the bowler's time, and the rest of the match was his. He worked very hard to maintain his wicket against the moving ball so that he could reap the rewards as his innings unfolded.

Of course, such a tactic is more suited to longer forms of the game. In essence, the opener's role is to ensure that the bowler's advantage (the new ball) is negated sufficiently in order to set up the innings for the remainder of the team. Naturally, it is hoped that the openers set up their own innings as well.

In one-day or Twenty20 cricket, there is little time to worry about the new ball. An opener's role in these games is not only to dent the effectiveness of the moving ball, but also to ensure the run rate is maintained from the start.

All top-order batsmen must be able to turn the strike over with quick singles or to hit to the available outfield space (the option in the first 10 overs of a limited-overs game). When done well, these measures ensure more victories than losses.

Sunil Gavaskar								
	Matches	Inns	Runs	HS	BT Ave	100s	50s	Catches
Tests	125	214	10122	236	51.12	34	45	108
ODIs	108	102	3092	103	35.13	1	27	22
First-Class	348	563	25834	340	51.46	81	105	293

Running Aggressively

Dean Jones, arguably one of Australia's finest one-day players, was an outstanding runner between the wickets. He was not only fast, but also prepared to take extra runs at every opportunity. He would challenge fielders by being aggressive in his turn. If the fielder made a slight blunder, he was off for another run. Paul Collingwood and A.B. de Villiers are two others who consistently run aggressively.

When running between wickets, you must know where the ball and fielders are just before you begin your turn. While taking a quick glimpse, make an objective decision as to the possibility of another run. Watch your bat slide across the crease as you turn, then explode from the crease, ready to run.

Note two important points. First, when turning, position your body to face the ball; don't look over your shoulder. Second, position yourself low in the turn so you can push off with your braced foot.

When multiple runs are obvious, you may make your first turn with the bat in your preferred hand rather than facing the ball, particularly if this helps facilitate a faster turn.

Of course, you don't have to run, and you wouldn't if the ball is fielded cleanly and is on its return. However, the aim of your aggression is to pressure the fielder into a mistake and to allow you that extra run.

Dean Jones								
	Matches	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	BT Ave	100s	Catches
Tests	52	89	11	3631	216	46.55	11	34
ODIs	164	161	25	6068	145	44.61	7	54
First-Class	245	415	45	19188	324	51.85	55	185
List A	285	276	43	10936	145	46.93	19	115

Some Rules for Running Between Wickets

Although sensible, aggressive running is vital in an overall offensive plan, it requires two-way verbal and physical communication. Generally on first runs, the striker should call and the non-striker, who is in the more advantageous position of backing up, should react instinctively. The non-striker should assert control in the following situations:

- The striker loses sight of the ball (the ball hits the pad and bounces away at an unusual angle).
- The striker does not call immediately.
- There is any hesitation.
- The non-striker is clearly in a better position to assess the run and is running to the danger end (such as when a ball is fumbled by a keeper).

Effective running essentially revolves around good judgement, clear and concise calling, running speed, and turning speed. Efficient running (making the most of every opportunity) combines the preceding qualities with faith and trust, which evolve from training, match conditioning, and familiarity with each team-mate's style of play. Of course, if there is any hesitation, shout "No" and keep an eye on your partner. Simply turning your back is not an option.

The strike should be changed as often as possible in order to keep the scoreboard ticking over, to unsettle the bowlers, and to give each batter a minor break from ball-to-ball concentration.

Running between wickets is not an exact science because it involves human judgement. However, it is trainable and very important.