

Leaving the Crease: From Player to Coach



Having taken just short of 1000 wickets in all competitions as an opening bowler for Lancashire, Peter Martin is well equipped to talk cricket. Here, he details his early years of coaching at Old Trafford after bringing down the curtain on his playing days.

With a year or so left of my playing career, I decided the switch to coaching and mentoring was for me. Such a role would be compatible with my abilities, experience and instincts. I had a strong urge to develop the next crop of Lancashire bowlers, having completed Level 1 and 2 coaching awards in pre-season in the 1990s. The achievement of these awards was, however, not undertaken with coaching in mind. I had wanted to help my game at this time, not considering a future pathway into coaching. That is not to say these qualifications didn't prove useful when it came to training as a coach: to be involved on Lancashire's coaching staff required at least a Level 3 award.

I took my Level 3 course in Durham and a memorable part was the contact with those coaches dealing with cricketers at all levels. Formal instruction also proved useful. Being introduced to the realities of leading group work and offering practical advice on the shop floor, rather than mere textbook regurgitation, was illuminating. It also confirmed I should continue to question everything.

There is a need for coaches to continually ask themselves what they are doing and why. This was certainly the case with me. Was I slapping myself on the back for great sessions? For whom were they great: the cricketers or me? Was I being effective, justifying my position, or just making it look good? When I used dozens of cones, baffling all those concerned, had I prepared my players the day before? As a general rule, keeping it simple on matchdays works! One remembers the former Australian batsman and coach, Bob Simpson's comments regarding Lancashire's batting, bowling, catching and warming up preparation, ahead of the side beating Somerset inside two days. Our opposition, Somerset, used many cones in their sessions, something Bob saw as mere fads, fashions and fancies.*

This summed it up for all of us at the time, clearly highlighting Bob's understanding of his players. After all, those who succeeded over a length of time, however talented, have kept their technique and game plans as simple and effective as possible. Why should coaching be any different? Personally, I like to plan all my sessions, whether on matchdays or not. However, I am conscious of the need to occasionally go against the session

plans and with my instincts. Disempowering a squad containing quality senior players, by dictating all activities and sticking rigidly to timetables, particularly on matchdays, can lead to lethargy and a drop in morale. Such results are not ideal if you want a performance from your big players. Non-matchdays are a different concept.

With an eye on effective preparation, you can let your imagination and cone monitoring run amok!

During my early years of dealing with the academy and its emerging young Lancastrians, I searched for complicated ways of moving forwards, rather like in my early playing days. With a similar outcome to the one experienced during my time on the pitch, I found progress to be disjointed and frustrating. It eventually dawned on me to adopt a simpler approach to coaching, as I had ultimately done with bowling. I was being too intense during one-to-one sessions and lacked confidence when taking large groups. Literally overnight, with guidance from Lancashire's head coach Mike Watkinson, who reminded me how simple my game plan had been as a player, I adopted a broader approach. This resulted in more relaxed one-on-one sessions and to my leading group sessions with greater confidence. In short, I now use uncomplicated drills that work in group situations and have a more creative approach to

one-on-one sessions. Being reminded to keep it simple has made a big difference to my effectiveness.

Keeping things simple is all very well and assumes a level of competence and technical innovation. New ways of approaching the learning process cannot, however, be ignored. Coach development is as important as being effective and contributes heavily to it. Every sport is looking for ways to glean an extra percentage here and centimetre there. Although I realise my journey has only just begun, and am aware of the need to continue development through ongoing support, I feel the best way forward is to urge coaches to embrace technology and innovation, while keeping a strong grip on reality and lessons already learned.

*** Bob Simpson was a coach of Lancashire for two seasons, having previously occupied the same role with Australia. Along with Allan Border, Bob is credited with starting Australia's domination of world cricket, which has lasted 20 years. During his playing days, Bob excelled as Test captain for his country.**

'There is a need for coaches to continually ask themselves what they are doing and why.'

Profile

Peter Martin played for Lancashire County Cricket Club as an opening bowler for 18 seasons, from 1987–2004. In this time, he took just shy of 1000 wickets, scored two centuries, collected eight winners' and five runners-up medals. Peter appeared for England 28 times, including eight Test matches, winning man of the match on his debut. He has successfully completed coaching awards at Levels 1–3 and has passed courses on counselling and management at the University of Central Lancashire. Peter continues to work with Lancashire's fast bowlers since ending his playing career.

This article is taken from edition 13 of *coaching edge*, the subscription magazine of sports coach UK. Covering the latest methods and techniques, and featuring interviews with some of sport's leading figures, *coaching edge* is a must read. Subscription costs only £18 a year (£13.75 for students) and includes four issues of the magazine. Further details and an application form can be found at: www.sportscoachuk.org

