



International Cricket Council

NET PRACTICE – Simon Taufel

Overview

Net practice should be an integral and important component of your match preparation and continuous improvement program. All ICC contracted Umpires are expected to attend net practices, so it is vital that these sessions be used in a proactive manner.

Players go to practice so that they can work on or develop their skills. Players work on improving their weaknesses and consolidating their strengths. The better players also use this forum to try new things or practice something that may be unconventional or new to them. Umpires should be no different in this area.

The purpose of this paper is to open your mind to the area of skill development and continuous improvement processes that can be performed at net practice.

Before You Get to Practice

Some important things to be aware of before you go to practice include:-

1. Be aware or plan what you want to do at practice – what part of your game are you going to work on? If you are going to give up a couple of hours to go to training then plan your session in order to achieve something for yourself. Don't attend just because you "have to" – aim to get something out of it.
2. Be aware of your strengths and weaknesses and identify if net practice may be of some use to you to improve these areas.
3. Don't try and improve or practice everything at once. Plan to work on one specific part of your game at the one time, that way you can focus entirely on that area. For example, if you want to work on "the ball pitching in line with leg stump", then forget about no balls and where the ball may have gone after pitching and concentrate solely on where

the ball pitches until you have improved that area. Then put the sequence of watching and judging back into practice.

4. Attend practice in the provided ICC Umpiring training uniform – look professional as the players will judge you also by how you look at what you do at training.
5. If you plan to work on an activity or skill that requires feedback (for example, head movement at the bowler's end for picking up no balls), then organize another Umpire or the Coach to work with you while you practice this skill. Don't be afraid to involve other Umpires and the Coach in your skill development exercises – the feedback can be then discussed and training method refined if necessary.
6. Don't be afraid to prearrange an activity at net practice – for example, if your next game is a one day game using white balls, then ensure the players will be using white balls at practice.

What Can Be Done at Net Practice?

Net practice is the place for skill development and for trying new things. Don't be afraid to experiment and look at things from a new perspective. For example, instead of always positioning yourself at the bowler's end at practice, you could try...

- Standing behind the batsman (at the back of the net)
- Standing next to the batsman (off side or leg side)
- Standing in line with the popping crease at the bowler's end.

The above positions could be used to work on a number of judgment skills including, but not limited to, no balls, LBW, bat pads and catches at the wicket.

Here is a list of possible skill areas that could be worked on or addressed at net practice:-

1. No balls (Front foot and above head height)
2. Wides (Laws of Cricket and one day playing conditions)
3. Balls pitching in line with the stumps
4. Picking up the flight / line of the ball
5. Concentration and focus routine
6. Communication / rapport with Captain, Coach and players
7. LBW decisions (could be broken down further into the 4 questions)
8. Caught behind decisions
9. Ball counting routine
10. Head movement (eye movement)
11. Player traits (seeing players for the first time and being able to deal with their "playing style")
12. Cardiovascular fitness / Core strength / Flexibility
13. Run out decisions (if there is a centre wicket practice as well)
14. Bowler's follow through – danger area
15. Playing conditions interpretations and knowledge (Group session)

16. Laws of cricket knowledge (Group session)

It is important to make use of ALL the facilities available at practice. You could use the following tools if they are made available in your state...

- Outdoor nets
- Indoor nets
- Bowling machines
- Video or net cameras
- TV and VCR's
- Indoor nets with the "mat" marked on them
- Red or white balls
- Gym

Examples of Skill Development Activities at Net Practice

1. Front foot no balls

Here are a few suggestions as to how this skill can be developed or improved at net practice. Firstly, you can establish how accurate your judgment is. Stand at the bowler's end (back as far as you would in a match) and have a partner stand on the popping crease. Call the no balls as you judge them with the net bowlers and then ask your training partner for feed back after each call. You could also discuss distance behind or over the popping crease in order to achieve the same objective.

Secondly, you could stand in line with the bowler's popping crease if there are bowlers in your net that are hard to judge. You can gain your own perception of what the bowlers are doing with their front foot.

Thirdly, you could experiment with moving closer or further away from the stumps to get a "better look" at where the front foot is landing – particularly if the bowler obscures the view of his front foot with his other leg.

When undertaking this activity, just concentrate on the placement of the front foot. Do not concern yourself with the other elements of the delivery (although be careful that the batsman does not hit the ball back at you!). Once you feel that you have achieved your desired outcome here, then put this skill to work in line with the processes of judging a full delivery sequence.

2. Ball pitching in line or outside off stump

Here are a few suggestions as to how this skill can be developed or improved at net practice. Firstly, you should pick a net or organize a net with either a left hand batsman with right arm bowlers or a right hand batsman with left arm bowlers. Focus on picking up where the ball pitches only and tell yourself or your partner (who may be standing directly behind you) where the ball pitched.

Secondly, you could use a bowling machine for the same purpose. The balls will land in a similar area but they will not all be the same. The players are often using these bowling machines in the nets – you can arrange to stand

behind one while they are practicing an appropriate shot. Focus on where the ball pitches and call out loud what line the ball pitched on (e.g. outside leg, middle and leg etc). This could be done with a training partner who stands behind you and providing you are both standing on the same line, you could compare judgments. Alternatively, you could investigate the use of using the net camera and the then viewing a recording of your judgments after you have catalogued the deliveries.

Thirdly, you could prepare an indoor net by using tape on the pitch to mark a leg stump line and use a bowling machine as described above. The judgment calls should be relatively easy with the taped line, but once you have got this mastered, you could try removing the tape and testing you judgment as described above.

Summary

1. Net practice is for your benefit – use your time wisely
2. Plan your practice sessions
3. Don't get distracted
4. Work on one skill at a time
5. Try new things – experiment
6. Use all the facilities available to help you
7. Work with a partner if appropriate
8. Review and evaluate your progress with your partner or Coach
9. Enjoy and fully participate in the session

Example of Net Practice Training Session (2hrs)

4pm	20 min Warm up	- 2 laps of oval (jog or run) - stretch key areas (back, hips, calves, glutes, hamstring)
4.20pm	30 min Fitness activity as per program developed by State Fitness Advisor	
4.50pm	30 min Skill Development Activity in practice nets with players and other umps.	
5.20pm	10 min Warm down	- 1 lap of oval (jog or run) - stretch key areas (back, hips, calves, glutes, hamstring, etc)
5.30pm	30 min Debrief with Coach	(eg. Net practice outcomes, previous match performance, interpretations, etc).

Good luck and make the most of out of your next net training session.