

Concentration in Cricket:

Understanding how to improve your focus and how to deal with distractions to improve your cricket performance.

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"When I bat, I block out everything apart from being at one with what I am doing. I am locked in. This requires me to feel supremely confident in my capabilities. I remain focused and positive whatever the situation."

(Carl Hooper, Former Vice Captain of West Indian Cricket Team)

According to Robert Nideffer (1981) who developed the theory of attentional style in sport, (different concentration style's and having the appropriate attention style for the sports situation) stated "it is necessary not only to think about an individual athlete's ability to develop certain types of attention, but also the attentional demands of the specific situation." (p.24).

Therefore, in cricket the attentional/concentration demands of the sport are such that it places significantly large demands on the cricketer and that the player needs to, especially within a four day game, understand their own individual needs and be aware of when and how to be intensely focused and when to have a softer focus, with less intensity.

Cricket requires a player- if to perform at their best - to have excellent concentration skills and to be aware of the various ever-changing game/situation, not to mention being aware of the concentration/attentional requirements of **ONE DAY** and **20/20** Cup Cricket, compared to a four-day game. Nideffer (1981) illuminates and

highlights this need of awareness from the sports performer and states, "the goal is to be able to train the athlete to control attention so that he/she can match that changing attentional demands in sport situations." (p.25)

In cricket, albeit if you are a batsman or bowler, keeper or an all rounder, you need to be able to switch your concentration/attentional style from a broad focus (the field placings and pitch) to a narrow focus (the ball/bowlers hand) for when keeping (focusing on the ball) and maintaining an internal positive focus on for example 'feeling confident' knowing what you need to do 'keeping line and length' and to avoid thinking about possible selectors present at the game or the coaches watching you and 'what do they think of me?' What are they thinking about my performance?

Or indeed anything external, for example, that may get in the way of the immediate focus and achieving your appropriate attentional style for that given task, for example, bowling (the last few overs of the days play) or facing the first delivery after lunch and not still thinking about lunch or any personal issues that may have arisen through checking your mobile phone for messages during the lunch and tea break.

What is concentration?

Concentration is a state of being that consists of an unwavering awareness of a specific subject/object to the momentary exclusion of other subjects/objects. However, it may vary in intensity. There are forms of **DEEP CONCENTRATION**, like being in the 'zone' for example as well as shorter, intense bouts of concentration.

Concentration also varies in duration, and we have different styles depending on the sport we play and the style of

concentration we need for optimal performance. Concentration is a relaxed state of being alert, and it **CAN** change its focus instantly to stay with the flow of competition.

There are different types of concentration. The following model called the attentional style model was proposed by Nideffer (1981) which looks at the direction of attention and to ascertain whether the cricketer is attending to his/her own thoughts and /or feelings, internal cues, or to things going on around him/her, external cues.

The four types of attention are developed when we combine the dimensions of **WIDTH** and **DIRECTION** these can be further developed and individually improved upon through self-awareness and practice.

1st DIMENSION of CONCENTRATION

BROAD & NARROW

As a batsman **EACH** delivery requires focusing on the bowlers hand and/or on the seam of the ball, watching the ball very closely. Or as a bowler, for example, focusing on the 'line and length' of the delivery. This requires a **NARROW** span of concentration.

Whereas standing back at the crease to look and observe the field placings in order to evaluate where to place and hit the ball through the gaps requires a **BROAD** span of concentration.

2nd DIMENSION of CONCENTRATION

INTERNAL=focusing on your sensations, feelings or thoughts.

EXTERNAL= focusing on people, things, or events outside yourself.

Whatever the object of concentration, according to Syer and Connolly (1998) whether internal or external (narrow or broad) the cricketer who has the deepest concentration is he who can harmonise the physical, emotional and mental strands of being and successfully focus them on the task at hand.



Michael Vaughan.