

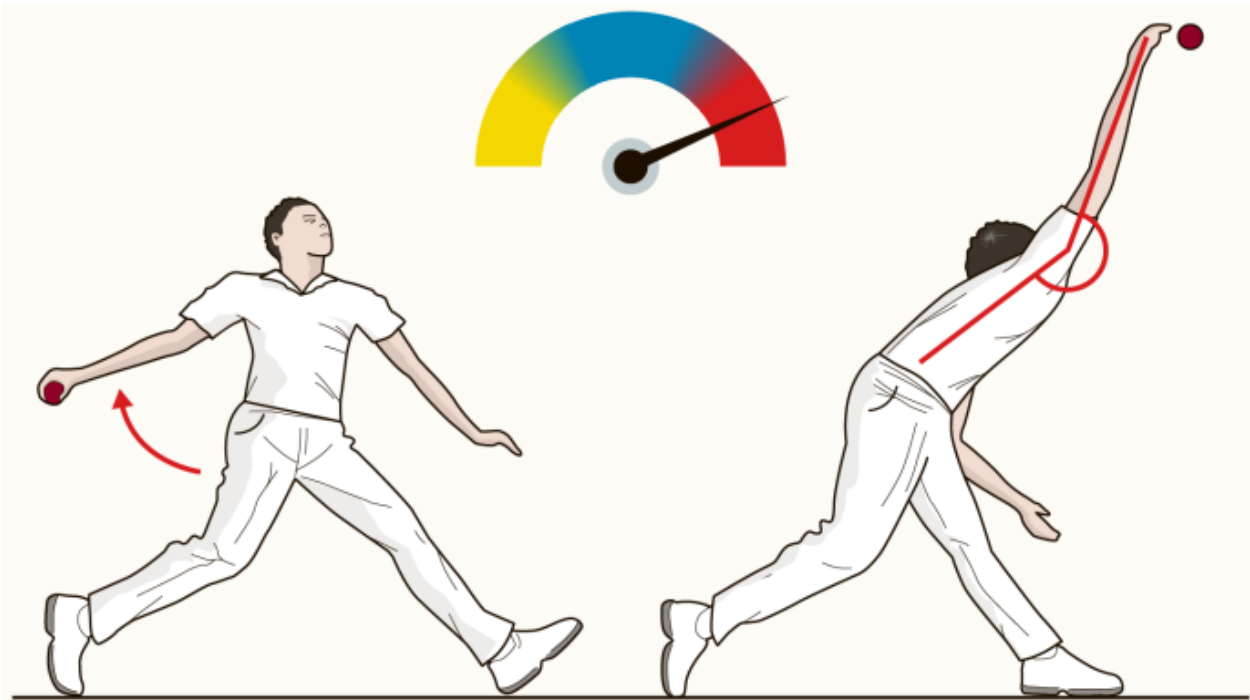
CRICKET

How England are creating their own Mitchell Starc

Elizabeth Ammon finds out what England are doing to combat the country’s dearth of genuine fast bowlers

Elizabeth Ammon

January 11 2018, 5:00pm, The Times



How a change of technique could hold the key to faster bowling, see below for detailed technical analysis

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It was probably the most defining and depressing theme of the Ashes: why could the

At the end of the 4-0 series defeat any observer worth taking seriously came to the same conclusion: skilful but innocuous medium-pace, right-arm seamers will not win you the urn in Australia. England will not win again down under unless they produce genuinely fast bowlers.

Is that possible? And what is being done about it? Some of the answers can be found at the ECB's National Cricket Performance Centre in Loughborough. England have had a pace-bowling programme for several years but Kevin Shine, the ECB's lead coach for pace bowling, is now seeing signs that England can produce the equivalent of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.



Leicestershire's Zak Chappell, part of the ECB's pace-bowling programme, trains under the watchful eye of Kevin Shine at Loughborough University

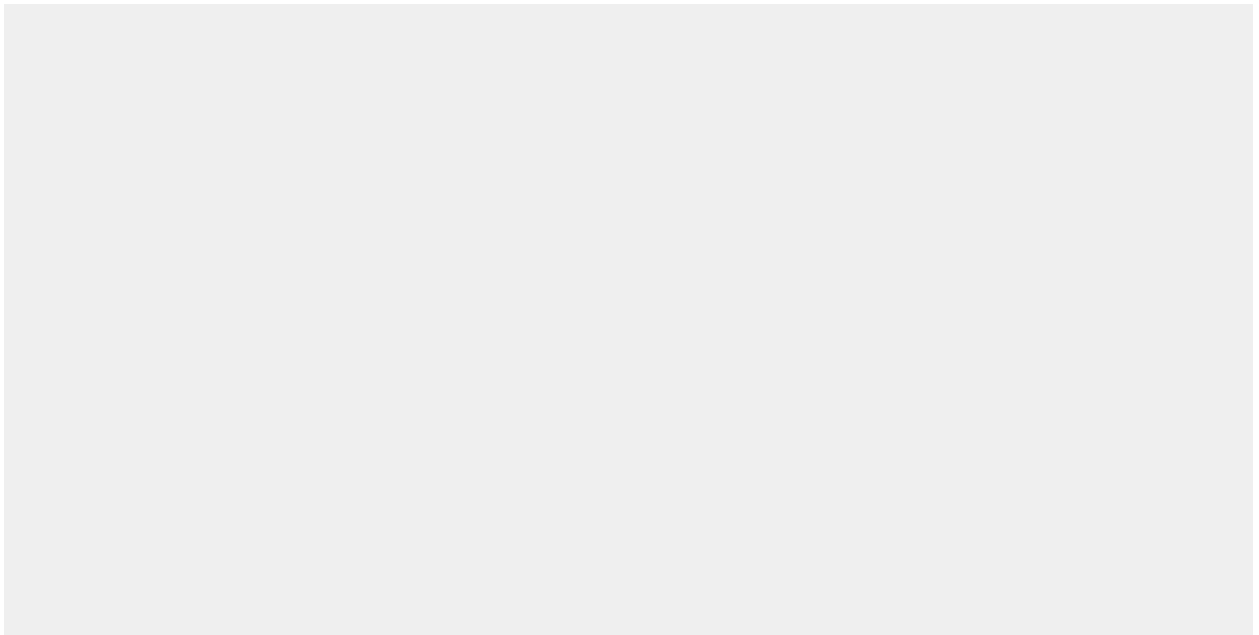
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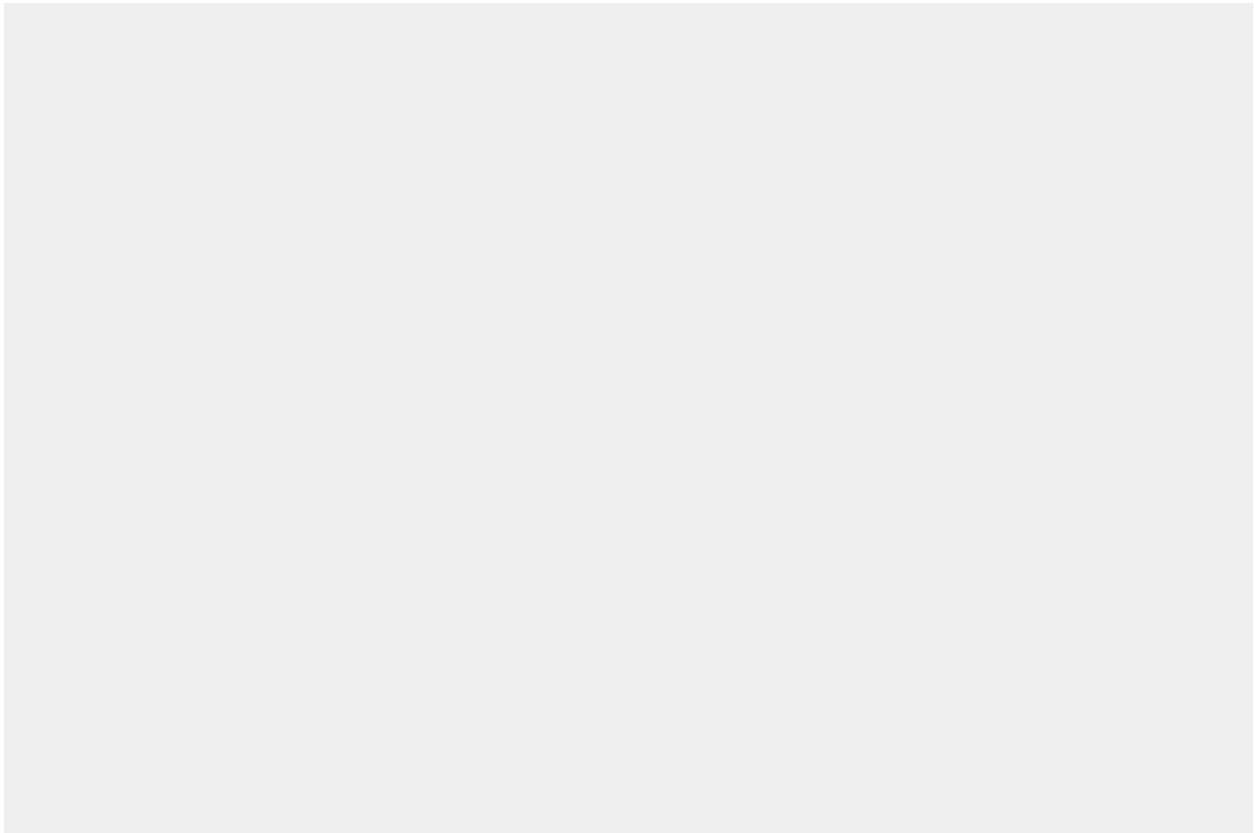
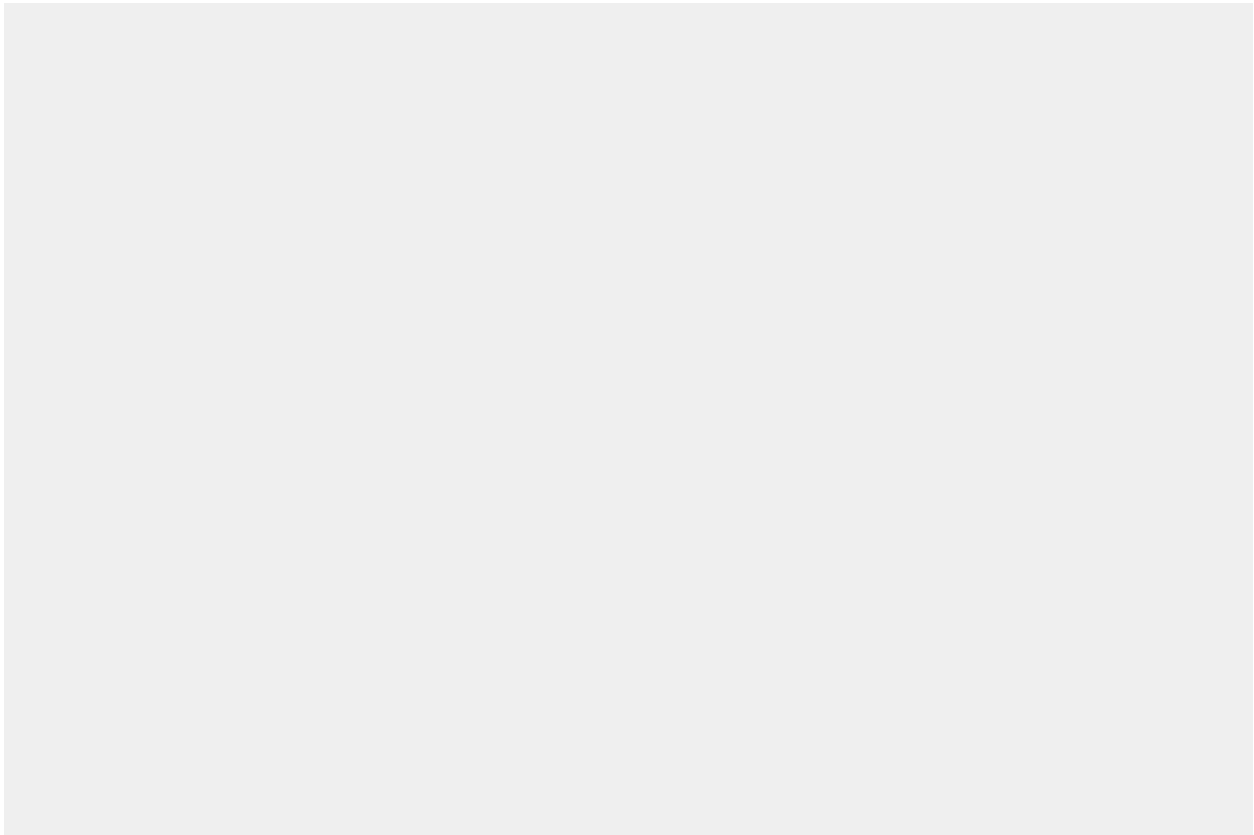
One thing is obvious from talking to Shine and the players on the ECB's pace-bowling programme — no stone is left unturned in trying to identify and develop fast bowlers. A lot of time and money goes into reaching that goal. There are six bowlers on the programme

with several others on England Lions duty or on overseas placements in the southern hemisphere.

Shine uses groundbreaking scientific research conducted by two former PhD students, Peter Worthington and Paul Felton, over the past decade to identify players who have the raw attributes of a fast bowler and then to model how fast, with some adjustments to their action, they should be able to bowl.

The raw science, while impressive, is impenetrable to a lay person. What is interesting is how that science is being put into practice. It comes to life when you look at one case study — the 23-year-old Middlesex seamer, Tom Helm.

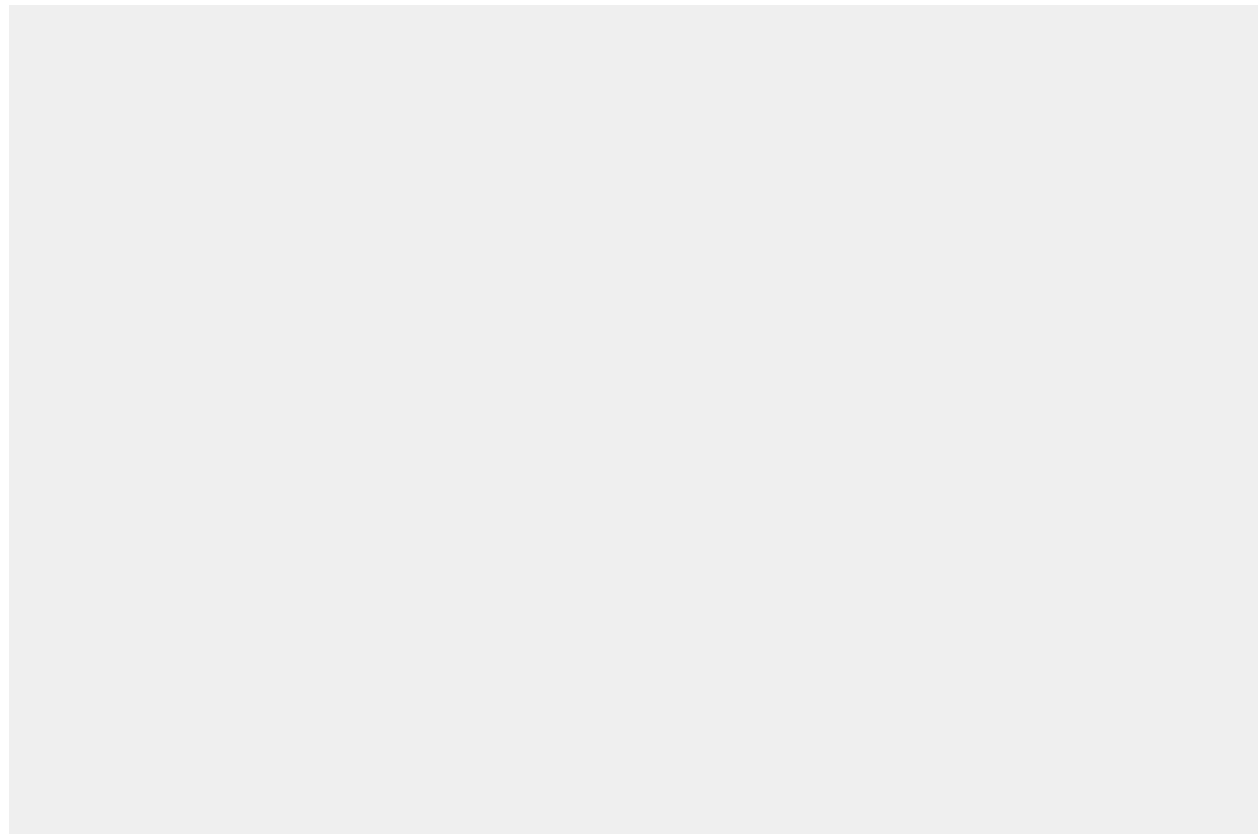




“First time I saw Tom bowl as an 18-year-old, he had height — he’s 6ft 5in — he got bounce and swing but he didn’t have much pace,” Shine says, “so I was very interested to

see if we could coach him to bowl fast but keep the swing, bounce and accuracy.”

As an 18-year-old Helm was bowling around 79mph but it was felt that he could bowl a lot faster. Helm was sent to Loughborough to have his action filmed and to spend 12 hours on a machine measuring the strength in each of his joints. His existing action and his joint and muscle data were then put through the model designed by Felton to look at what needed to happen to make him bowl faster, whether it was changes to his technique, increasing his core strength or a combination of both. It showed that some changes to his technique could give at least a 10 per cent increase in speed. Five years down the line, with a new action that he is still learning, and hampered by a couple of injuries, Helm is consistently bowling 87mph with some deliveries clocked at even faster speeds.



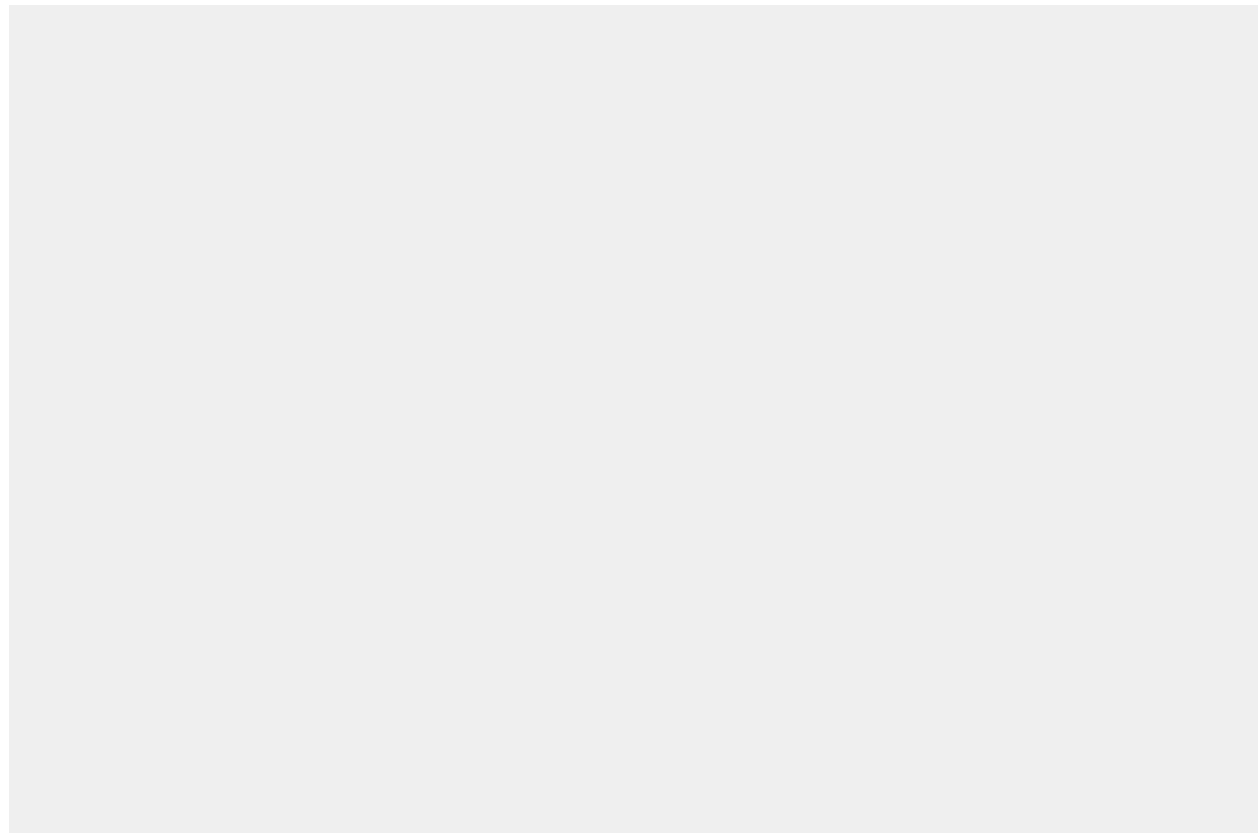
Shine shows Essex's Jamie Porter a clip of his bowling action in the nets

TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER BRADLEY ORMESHER

Trevor Bayliss, the England head coach, has said that planning for the next Ashes in Australia, in 2021-22, needs to start now and Shine believes that there are a number of players in the pace programme or England set-up that we could see in action.

“I am really excited about who we could have in the next few years,” Shine says. “Mark Wood, Jamie Overton, Zak Chappell, George Scrimshaw, Tom Barber have all hit 90mph or more on the speed gun. We know Chris Woakes can bowl 90mph. He didn’t in this series because he was coming back from injury and perhaps some other factors. Everything has to be right for bowlers to hit peak speeds. We saw this series that even Starc’s pace was down a bit because he had hurt his heel.”

Another example of how Shine and his team have identified potential is the Essex bowler Paul Walter. He has played in county cricket for only a year and was plucked out of club cricket primarily as a batsman, but Shine saw that he is a 6ft 8in left-armer who could bowl some balls at up to 88mph but, because he has not played much, did not have a full understanding of his action. While a slightly late developer, Walter, 23, is now on the pace programme and Shine believes that he can continue to get faster without losing the accuracy he had.



Chappell is one of six bowlers who Shine has clocked bowling 90mph
TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER BRADLEY ORMESHER

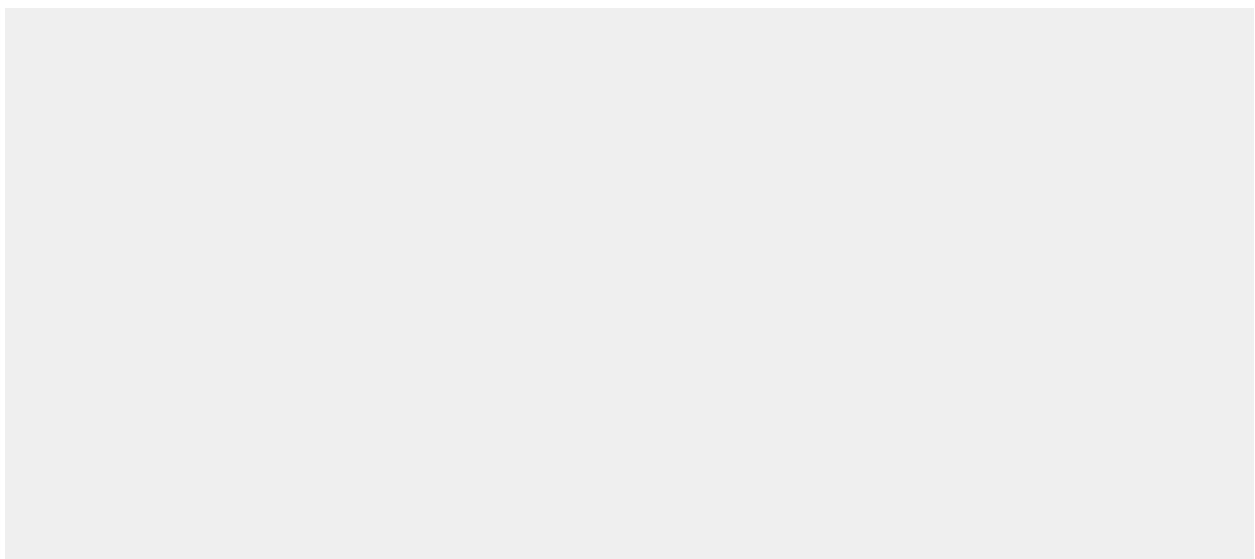
So why are these players not progressing to play for England? “Injuries is a massive

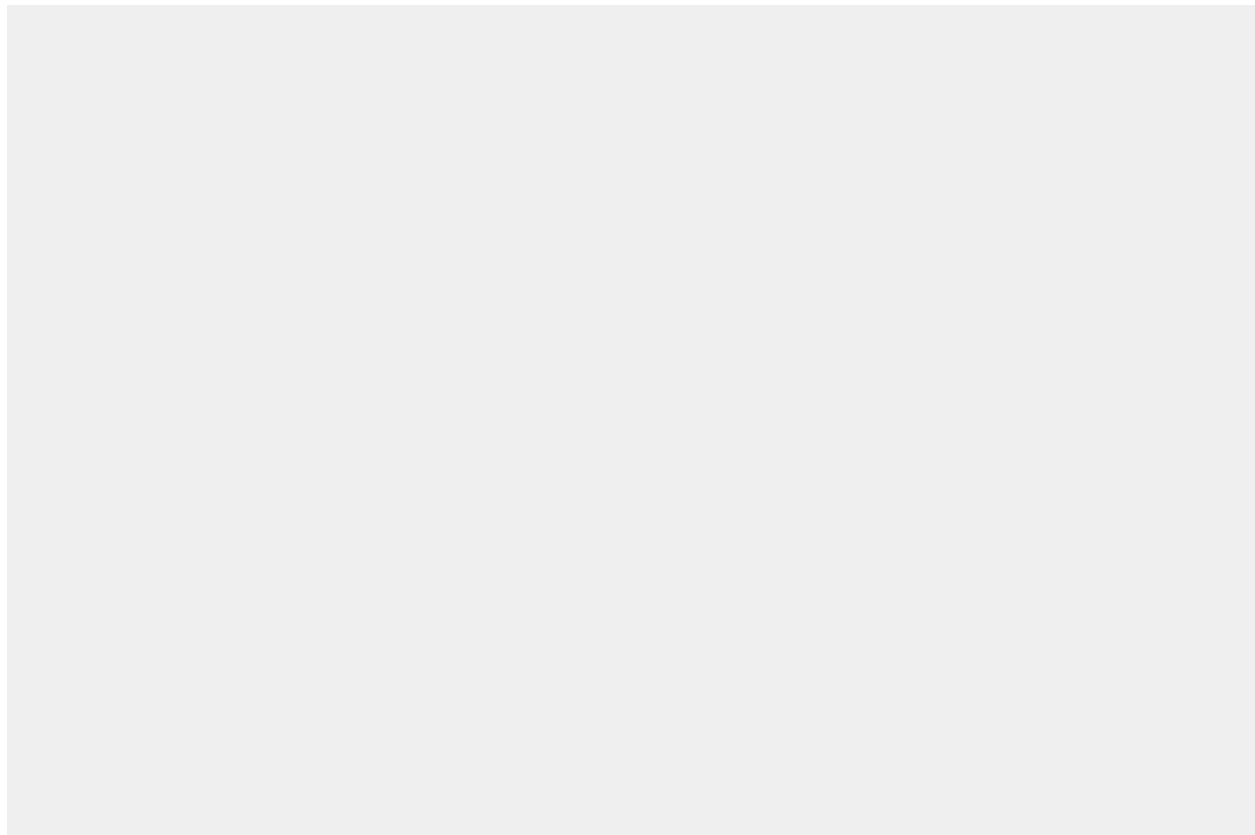
factor,” Shine says. Certainly England’s bowling attack was hampered by injuries. Wood, Steven Finn and Toby Roland-Jones, to name just three who never made it on to the field, while a number of the bowlers that Shine works with have had injury setbacks in their careers. Helm has had two stress fractures and more recently a hamstring injury. Overton missed most of last season for Somerset because of a stress fracture on his right side. Warwickshire’s Olly Stone, another player who has topped 90mph, sustained an anterior cruciate ligament injury which kept him out for almost a year, and the 24-year-old is now in Perth playing grade cricket to try to get his speed back.

One of the other issues that the ECB team faces is that the bowlers they have identified are employed and paid by the counties, and Shine does not have day-to-day control over their coaching or workload. However the development of an app that all first-class counties use, as well as the ECB, means that all of the data relating to particular players is shared and there is a much more collaborative approach now than there ever has been.

Ultimately though, Shine cannot instruct the counties who to play or rest and the varying workloads and conditions will, inevitably, have an impact on both keeping players fit and the pace of their bowling.

It is worth remembering that Australia managed to keep Starc, Cummins and Hazlewood fit for the Ashes by managing their workloads, stopping them from playing much first-class cricket for their state team or taking county cricket contracts, and by micro-managing them.





Wood's England career has been restricted by three ankle operations but he is part of the Test squad to tour New Zealand in March

SCOTT BARBOUR/GETTY IMAGES

And that brings us to the amount of cricket that English seamers play. It is something Shine recognises although he is keen to stress the value of county cricket and getting overs under their belts. “Do we play too much?” he asks. “We definitely play more than Australia or South Africa and that does have an effect. But playing county cricket is vital: it gets them game time, it teaches them pressure situations and allows them to put into practice the things we work on.”

If the ECB were to be radical it might consider centrally contracting a number of pace bowlers so it has control over when they play county cricket. It is an idea that Shine has mooted although, as yet, nothing has come of it.

One of Shine's main objectives is to unearth something that is a genuine rarity in England — a left-arm seamer. “We are currently trying to find as many left-armers as possible and bring them through,” he says. “That is absolutely one of our priorities. George Garton at Sussex has been fast-tracked despite having played very little first-class cricket and there is Luke Wood at Nottinghamshire, Matt Taylor at Gloucestershire, Sam Curran at Surrey and

Dave Payne at Gloucestershire, as well as Reece Topley [at Hampshire].”

It is clear that, despite accusations to the contrary, county cricket continues to produce pace bowlers.

What Shine cannot do anything about is injuries or the structural issues that hamper the progression of fast bowlers. He cannot do anything about the sheer volume of cricket that county cricketers play. He cannot make counties rest players, nor can he make them select them. He cannot do anything about the pitches that they bowl on — which are very often slow and low or nibbling green seamers. He cannot do anything about the ECB’s decision to push the County Championship to the margins of the season and, most importantly, he cannot make the selectors pick players from his programme.

From the outside it seems England are incredibly risk averse when it comes to picking bowlers who have the raw pace but who do not necessarily have the accuracy. Perhaps it is time to throw some of Shine’s protégés into the mix, accepting that they may not take a hatful of wickets straightaway. Otherwise it could be another very miserable trip to Australia in four years’ time.

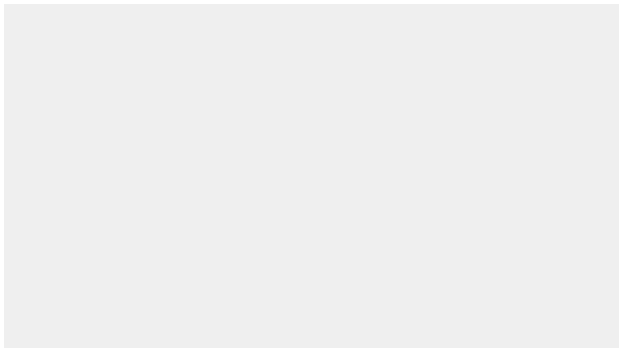
WHO ARE THE BOWLERS TO
WATCH OUT FOR?

- George Garton** — Age 20, Sussex, fast left-arm
 - George Scrimshaw** — 19, Worcestershire, right-arm fast-medium
 - Tom Barber** — 22, Middlesex, left-arm seaming all-rounder
 - Tom Helm** — 23, Middlesex, right-arm fast-medium
 - Zak Chappell** — 21, Leicestershire, right-arm fast-medium
 - Jamie Overton** — 23, Somerset, fast right-arm
 - Josh Tongue** — 20, Worcestershire, right-arm fast-medium
 - Saqib Mahmood** — 20, Lancashire, right-arm fast-medium
 - Reece Topley** — 23, Hampshire, left-arm fast-medium
 - Paul Walter** — 23, Essex, left-arm medium-fast
-

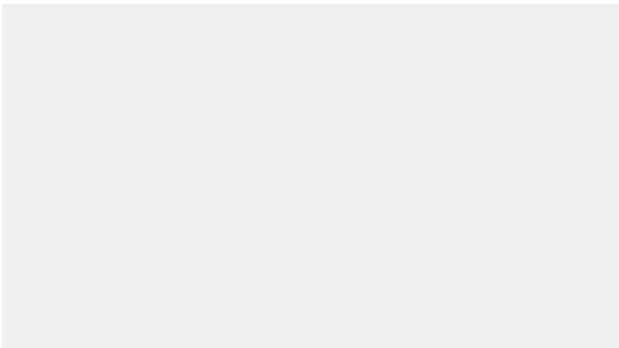
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[mark](#) 1 hour ago

Interesting that there's no mention of Tymal Mills. Few times I've seen him he's bowled very fast.

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Reply

[John Lipscombe](#) 1 hour ago

@mark

Due to chronic back problems Tymal is only playing T20 cricket.

Recommend

Reply

mark

1 hour ago

@John Lipscombe @mark That's a shame, looked like he a had a bright future. Thanks for the info.

Recommend

Reply

sultan

2 hours ago

Why are there so many injuries today, despite the unprecedented emphasis on fitness in the modern game, when earlier English pacemen, such as Truman, Statham, Snow, Willis, who were quite sharp and bowled many more overs per season, never seemed to be injured.

1

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Reply

John Rolfe

2 hours ago

We can beat them - and have - without quicks if they have no quicks. But it is unlikely they will not bring their quicks to form and fitness for future Ashes series. Therefore the programme makes complete sense.

Recommend

Reply

Rafaista

13 hours ago

We won in Australia with Small, and Defreitas, Botham. Fast bowlers have been rare in English cricket, as have our wins in Australia. This search for pace is utter cod. McGrath? More recently Philander? You need skill and technique - end off. Generating bounce from your action need not come from speed alone. Marshall post 84, and Caddick show that men with different heights can get the ball to lift off a good length or move it off the pitch- just enough to get an edge, which is less half an inch. All rubbish. Fast blowing programme more like

Recommend

Reply

Robert Cannon

13 hours ago

@Rafaista Dille bowling fast was also a contributory factor as to why we won that 86/87 series. No-one is seriously advocating 4 out and out speed merchants but if you can combine skill and technique with pace as for example Fred Trueman did you've got a hell of a bowler.

1

Recommend

Reply

Rafaista

12 hours ago

Dille never bowled long sessions of pace again after his injury in 82. But I get your point. He was mid 80s at best. Gillespie extracted bounce but he was not charging in bowling Shoiab pace. Skill is everything. Hadlee had no trouble in Australia. The

search is cod. It is the scapegoat. It was KP last time. This time it is something they didn't have.

Recommend

Reply

Mr Muttley 4 hours ago

@Rafaista In 86/87 Dilley was still England's fastest bowler, and by then had a great outswinger to match. Pace has long been a vital component for great teams, even if not Shoiab-fast. McGrath and Hadlee were sharp as well as skilful and accurate - which is why McGrath is an all time great while Angus Fraser (post injury) was a trundler on flat wickets.

I fail to see why you should be so disparaging about a genuine attempt to develop quicker bowlers and rectify a clear gap in England's resources. It's not as if they're saying forget about skill and just bowl flat out. It's not as if they're telling the next Jimmy Anderson to stop trying to swing the ball. I can't see there's anything to lose here.

2

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Reply

Rafaista 1 hour ago

Fairdo, but it is just a comment thread on cricket.

Recommend

Reply

Growltiger 3 hours ago

@Rafaista Fast bowlers with technique have the edge over medium pacers with technique. The speed defeats the adjustment efforts of the best batsmen. Furthermore, some of the reverse swing effects really only work aerodynamically at higher speeds - the sort of dipping yorkers dispensed by Waqar or Starc are not available at 84 mph. The psychological effect of the existence of these weapons also wears down the overall resistance of the batsmen, and thus creates more wicket opportunities for the other bowlers. So it has to be valuable to the England team to develop genuine fast bowlers.

2

Recommend

Reply

Rafaista 1 hour ago

A fast bowler who gets bounce and movement is better than a fast medium who does the same- sorry all I care about are wickets taken. Btw you can reverse it at 75. Speed is not the key to reverse. The man who invented it was medium pacer from Pakistan. He bowled damn good yorkers too.

Recommend

Reply

[Chris Roman](#) 14 hours ago

History says that bowling fast can be damaging to your health on English wickets. It only takes a tiny slip around the delivery stride on a damp morning to do harm to any one of several body parts and joints. And there are a lot of damp mornings in an English summer.

Recommend

Reply

[onthetreadmill](#) 14 hours ago

@Chris Roman That is not how the injuries occur.

Recommend

Reply

[Londoner](#) 15 hours ago

Shouldn't we have a spin academy? I would volunteer to be Assistant Professor of Leg Spin.

2

Recommend

Reply

[David Oldham](#) 16 hours ago

Jamie Porter pictured but not "a bowler to look out for"?

75 wickets at 16.83 in Division 1 last season.

Recommend

Reply

[Hobbes](#) 16 hours ago

What sort of article is this?! England will never produce truly fast bowlers in this day and age. The wickets in the UK simply do not allow it. To bowl at express pace requires the ball to bounce and gather speed off the pitch. It also requires a dry hot atmosphere. Physicality is only one of the necessary ingredients and thats why Australia produces express bowlers regularly. If any of these guys were to move to England and spend the bulk of their time on English pitches they would soon become disillusioned and have to find other ways to take wickets like line and length and inswing and outswing.

2

Recommend

Reply

[Pastaman](#) 17 hours ago

I'm hoping that Mahmood will be given more games this year at Lancashire. We've lost Ryan McLaren and Kyle Jarvis so in theory he should. However we've signed Onions (who's 35 and injury prone) so we'll see.

Recommend

Reply

[onthetreadmill](#) 14 hours ago

[@Pastaman](#) Onions bowled more overs than any other bowler in the Northern Hemisphere between 2012 and 2015. Not bad for an 'injury prone' athlete.

Recommend

Reply

[Pastaman](#) 11 hours ago

[@onthetreadmill](#) [@Pastaman](#) Respect to him then. However since 2015.....? We've given him a two year contract. Not sure why.

Recommend

Reply

[pvm](#) 17 hours ago

I applaud the effort, but it's worrying me that it seems to be a top-down effort. Throw money at it, produce a few youngsters and hopefully win the Ashes in 4 years' time, that seems to be the attitude. When the urn is earned what happens to the motivation of the programme? The county game should produce and nurture fast bowlers. Could they be playing too much? Do they rely on swing too much? Is there even a motivation to bowl not just 90 but 94mph if possible? Counties should be resolving these issues. The sports science at Loughborough should simply be augmenting those efforts, and not be the lab that "grows" bowling speeds in the first place.

Recommend

Reply

[A Firswell](#) 17 hours ago

As an 18-year-old Helm was bowling around 79mph
2 mph faster than Anya Shrubsole, then!

Recommend

Reply

[Rafaista](#) 13 hours ago

Speed guns are rubbish. If Shrubsole bowls 78mph...

Recommend

Reply

[onthetreadmill](#) 17 hours ago

Stress fractures in the lumbar spine is a big issue for these bowlers. Some are undergoing repeated cycles of conservative management when surgery might be a better option.

Recommend

Reply

[Colin Gamble](#) 18 hours ago

A truly fast bowler is a shock weapon and can only be expected to bowl in short spells. Even when the West Indies had four in the side they struggled to bowl 90 overs in a day and needed other bowlers in the side. We also need a good spinner and arguably it was the performances of Nathan Lyon and Moen that made the most difference in this series.

2 Recommend Reply

A Firswell 17 hours ago

@Colin Gamble

Moen? You mean Ali, or did I overlook another one?
The one I'm thinking of contributed a great deal to Australia's wins.

1 Recommend Reply

Nicholas Clarke 18 hours ago

Youngsters love to try to bowl fast. Coaches invariably tell them not to, but concentrate on line and length. In many ways it's very good advice, but we shouldn't be surprised at the result.

Recommend Reply

Kevin Berry 18 hours ago

Jofra is keen to opt fo rEngland so hopefully that will come to fruition, George Garton is also a great prospect so there is a good pipeline coming out of Sussex.

Recommend Reply

JT 19 hours ago

What about persuading Jofra Archer to opt for England?

Recommend Reply

Rafaista 13 hours ago

No, no. We can't turn windies into our Pacific islands. They need what talent they have got.

Recommend Reply



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