



Somerset CCC Writing Competition

By Fifth Form Sports Scholar Florence
March 2020

England stamped their ground in India emphatically during the first Test Match. Joe Root was in sparkling form, scoring close to 300 runs over two innings, once again proving why he is a major part of the 'fabulous four' (Smith, Kohli, Williamson and Root). This, coupled with Root's team putting in a genuine 'team performance,' meant England were too strong for the world no. 2 ranked side.

In my opinion, Root and Sibley stood out for England, as the most successful batters. For India, Pant shone, albeit not bright enough.

Dominic Sibley is a relatively new addition to Root's England side. He opens the batting, and England batted first, so we will start with him. Sibley's patience, his stubborn style of batting and mature attitude were the most important factors in his first innings score of 87, from 286 balls.

A run-rate of 30 seems low. However, this was exactly what the doctor ordered Sibley to do. He batted very slowly, at first leaving the vast majority of balls outside the off stump and only playing in his comfort zone, which is straighter and favours the leg side. This patience frustrated the likes of Bumrah as well as tiring them out. This meant that when the loose balls came, patient Sibley was ready to pounce. His innings was slow, but very steady, giving England the platform to score more readily later on in the innings. He enjoys a ball on his pads, and often plays straight drives, with his head still, over the ball, angling the bat at the last minute to score leg side runs. This stillness in the way he plays the ball definitely helped him to bat successfully in the first innings, giving Root a solid partner for the start of his innings.

Sibley's confidence rose as his patience paid off, when the Indian inexperienced spin bowlers came on (not Ashwin). He made sure that when he was moving forward, he fully committed, moving his feet as close to the pitch of the ball as possible, whereas when he moved back, he made sure he had as much time as possible to play the ball under his line of sight, late. This meant he could score runs behind square on the offside freely, as well as happily pushing the ball to deep midwicket for leisurely singles. Overall, Sibley's innings was not characterised with big boundaries and fast scoring, but his patience enabled him to tick along, sticking to his own skillset as a batsman, doing a fine job for the side.

For me, the best thing to take from Sibley's innings was the cricketing partnership which he offered his captain, Mr Root. He gave him a firm base with which to build an innings. Secondly, Joe Root. A serial-run-scorer.

Root's first innings score, in his 100th test, was 218 from 377 balls. A faster run-rate to his friend Mr Sibley. Root came into this test brimming with confidence after back-to-back centuries in Sri Lanka. This confidence, his fine technique and once again his commitment to the shot, whether that was moving forward or moving backwards, explains how he scored this many.

Unlike Sibley, no disrespect intended, Joe Root does not have a specified comfort zone in his style of cricket. He scores runs everywhere. He came out with a very positive approach. Now that the ball was not swinging, he was very happy reasonably early on the get his feet moving and drive outside his off stump, scoring many runs through the covers.

He, much like Sibley, respected the good balls and knew when to attack – mainly 'picking on' the new spinners, Nadeem and Sundar – whose bowling run-rates show their inexperience – being higher than the other bowlers.

Root has a very conventional technique, so it is hard to pin down why he does so well. In my opinion, it is because of his high regards for the basics of cricket; he moves his feet towards the pitch of the ball, he hits the ball late under his eyes, he attacks when we need him to attack. This is how he got to his 200+ score, because he stuck to what he knows, chose wisely the bowlers to take on and did so brilliantly.

Rishabh Pant is the one Indian batter who I think stood out. He scored 91 from 88 balls, in a situation where India were in a lot of pressure.

Usually, in such a situation, the conventional reaction would be to defend, dig in, and try to slowly rebuild your team's progress.

However, of the back of a wonderful match winning innings in Australia, he, like Root was bubbling over with confidence.

Pant came out and played as if it were ODI cricket. This shook the England bowling attack, which certainly allowed for his success. Making the bowler feel uncomfortable helps batsman a lot, as it can put them off kilter. He chose Jack Leach as a target, and hit him for many boundaries.

This was very impressive as by this stage in the game, with England having batted for two days, there were cracks in the pitch, which makes it more dangerous to attack spinners, as the ball turns and bounces more. Pant's movements whilst facing Leach were big. He either

moved so far forward, trotting down the pitch, that he met the ball on the half volley, taking the cracks out of the game and whacking him over his head. Or, he moved right back in his crease when Leach tried to put the ball shorter to catch him out. This taught me how important it is to commit to your shot, not to play half heated cricket – even if you're in a pressurised circumstance in the match. Pant's innings links with the 'challenge and threat' psychology used in Physical Education. He was challenged by an innings where the necessary aim outweighed his resources, but he chose to attack and be positive, believing in himself. Sadly, for India, his efforts were not enough.

Concluding, Root showed the best display of all. With all three batters having a clear game-plan, showing great game awareness. Their most linked styles in their batting was committing to the shot, wisely selecting their cricketing prey, and playing the ball late, timing it to perfection.