

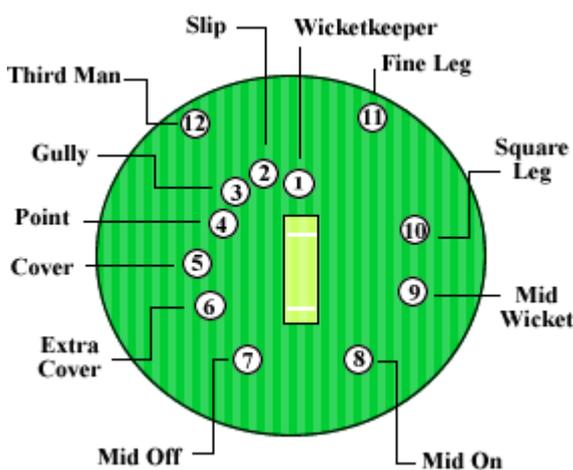
Cricket Fielding Positions

The names of cricket fielding positions can be baffling to the uninitiated. It takes a little while before such names as fine leg, gully or third man become second nature.

However, fielding is such a vital part of the game that all players need to be familiar with these strange terms. And, once you know them, listening to the radio commentary takes on another dimension.

The fielders are placed by the captain, depending on his tactics. This is a challenge in itself, because out of the eleven players on the field, one must bowl and another must keep wicket. The nine remaining fielders are simply too few to defend all parts of a cricket field, so their deployment depends on the captain's skill and the bowler's accuracy. No captain can set cricket fielding positions for bad bowling. However, a bowler who "bowls to his field" can pressurise batsmen, and pressure leads to falling wickets.

In days gone by, fielding was regarded as a chore in between batting and bowling. Now, fielding skills are a vital part of the game, and can make the difference between winning and losing a match. Once the fielders can treat every ball as a big event, they are on their way to winning the game.



This picture shows the "standard" cricket fielding positions for a right handed batsman. They are a mirror image for left handers. However, the positions can be varied almost infinitely, depending on tactics.

If a position is described as "deep" or "long", then the fielder is usually placed on the boundary, eg deep mid off. A position labelled as "short" is usually closer to the batsman than normal, eg short cover. And a position prefixed by "silly" is very close to the batsman, eg silly mid off.

Other variations use the terms "square" and "fine". The line of sight from a square fielder is at right angles to the wicket, eg square leg, or square cover. Conversely, the line of sight from a "fine" fielder is more parallel to the wicket, eg fine third man.

Many players are expert in particular cricket fielding positions. Specialist slip fielders have the fast reactions and acrobatic agility to take catches that can come quickly and at all angles. Expert cover fielders have the speed and agility to cut off potential boundary shots, and to throw the ball fast and accurately over the stumps to the wicketkeeper. Deep fielders have good judgement for high catches, and a strong throwing arm to return the ball quickly and prevent runs.

The wicketkeeper has special skills that are unique within any cricket team. He stands behind the wickets, and catches all balls that pass the batsman – off the bat or otherwise. The faster the bowler, the further back from the wickets he will stand. However, for slow bowlers, the wicket keeper will stand close to the wickets to try and dismiss the batsman by stumping. The wicketkeeper is also well placed to tell the captain about any potential weaknesses shown by the batsman

The slip fielders stand next to the wicket keeper. Their objective is to take catches that fly off the edge of the bat. The slips need to have fast reactions and often, acrobatic agility to take difficult, fast moving catches, or simply to cut off potential edges to the boundary. First slip is often set deeper than the wicketkeeper, because fine edges can travel very quickly indeed.

Third man is usually viewed as a defensive cricket fielding position, to prevent anything passing the slips or gully from reaching the boundary. Third man is usually responsible for covering a large area. However, some bowlers place a short third man to prevent singles, or even take catches that fly past the gully.

Gully must field shots that are often hit hard off the face of the bat. So, this is another specialist position that needs fast reactions and a safe pair of hands, to stop runs and take spectacular catches.

Point is a very busy position, where the fielder must be prepared to field hard hit square cuts or drives off the face of the bat. Or, a slow bowler may place this fielder at “silly point” – very close to the batsman, to catch any bat/pad chances.

Any fielder in a “silly” position may have to take rapid evasive action to avoid any hard hit shots. ECB regulations also prevent junior fielders from standing less than 11 or 8 metres from the bat, depending on age. And, regardless of age, anyone fielding very close to the bat should wear a protective helmet and shin guards.

The cover position includes the area between point and mid off. It’s another key position for putting pressure on batsmen by cutting off runs and threatening run-outs. Many of the world’s outstanding fielders have fielded at point and cover.

Mid off is a key cricket fielding position for cutting off straight drives and stopping quick singles. It is also a good position for the captain to field, so that he can discuss tactics with the bowler – or simply offer encouragement when things are not going according to plan.

Mid wicket and square leg are generally defensive positions for cutting off boundaries and preventing quick singles. However, they must also be prepared for sharp catches that may come their way from misjudged hooks and pulls.

Fine leg is often treated by captains as the best cricket fielding position to rest his bowlers between overs, or after a long bowling spell. However, it can still be a busy area if batsmen are skilled at playing the ball square or fine off their legs. As with any deep position, it can be difficult to pick up the flight or line of the ball coming toward you, so make sure that you’ve picked these up before you move too far – to avoid embarrassment!

