

SPORTS PAGE BEHIND THE
DAVID HOOKES TRAGEDY.

WAS IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, ON TUESDAY. (AP)

The fine art of no-balling: Akram's closely-guarded secret

THE LAST
WORD
RAJAN BALA



Pakistan's wonderful bowler Wasim Akram is clearly a fine teacher. Hence we have had this fuss kicked up by that country's coach, Javed Miandad, about his guiding the Indian youngster Irfan Pathan on the present tour to Australia.

In fact, Miandad seems to be more worried about whether Akram would teach the Indian batsmen how to counter reverse swing. One of the all-time bowling greats though Akram is, he would be the first to admit that his batting at best was a matter of not coming up to

expectations. He does not have the mind of a batsman like Miandad or like our own Sunil Gavaskar.

I do not believe that Miandad has anything to worry about on this score and the fuss is needless, to say the least. What Miandad probably does not know is how clever Akram was as a bowler.

When I was in Australia, I told Greg Chappell that Akram was the only outstanding bowler who got away with so many no-balls.

In fact, I went to the extent of suggesting that it was possible that one-third of his 900-plus international wickets — both in Tests and in one-dayers — were the result of deliberate no-balls. Chappell was both surprised and shocked. But he

heard me asking Akram if this was true and was amused when the bowler answered in the affirmative.

Akram said, "Yes, and I was aware of this. It was up to the umpires to penalise me. I had such a fast arm action that the umpires had to really concentrate at the batsman's end."

"Also, since I bowled more often than not from over the wicket and wide of the crease in order to have a free passage, it was virtually impossible for an umpire to no-ball me."

"If I got an advantage of a couple of feet, I would put it down to my ingenuity as well as to the incompetence of the umpires. In fact, I remember quite well that in my first hat-trick in Test matches, the second batsman

was dismissed off a no-ball." Akram is a very nice person and one who enjoys life. This is why he is such a close buddy of Ravi Shastri.

All his deception was restricted to the field and he will be always remembered as a thinking bowler.

He is also very frank or else he would not have revealed what has been a well-kept secret. But he was candid enough to admit that he had been asked this question for the first time by anybody.

He said, "I really wonder why and how it struck you. But since it is the truth that I deliberately overstepped — I have no reservation whatsoever in admitting it. In a way it is like walking when one knows one is out. One does not

has secured his berth in the Chaturvedi.

ed for the Test series in Aus-

contention for the longer ver-

team," the selector stated.

walk as it is for the umpires to give one out.

"Similarly, it is for the umpires to penalise me for over-stepping. Why should I not take advantage of umpires who are not in a position to see where my front-foot landed?"

"I arrived quicker on the batsman and it was to my advantage."

I wonder whether he has imparted his little secret to Pathan as also to the other Indian left-arm new ball

bowlers like Zaheer Khan and Ashish Nehra. It would help them too. Well, if somebody reads this and informs Miandad, he would be even more perturbed.

And who knows, he might even request the Pakistan Cricket Board and its new chief Shahryar Khan to bring

Akram home post haste!

Akram has gone on record to say that he is yet to receive an invitation from the PCB to join the think tank in the light of the forthcoming Indian tour to Pakistan. But after the fine performances by the Indian team, especially the batsmen, in the Tests in Australia, those who run the game in Pakistan are a trifle apprehensive.

In private Akram confessed that he would be happier to be spared any assignment with Pakistan cricket as "one can never tell how quickly things can change." He should know better than most that it does.

Yet the fact remains that he is a proud and loyal Pakistani and if the PCB can rope in Imran Khan, the one

person Akram admires the most, then he would be there working alongside his mentor. If the chief executive of the PCB, Rameez Raja, has his way, then the preparation for the Indians will go on in right earnest. What was the secret behind Akram's success?

He summed it up succinctly, "I think it lay in believing that one is an attacking bowler whose first job is to take wickets. This was true in the limited-overs version of the game as well. Imran made it clear to me from the outset that he never wanted me to think defensively."

"He also said that variety was important once your tearaway days were behind you. The science of reverse swing was imparted to us and thereafter it became

much easier. How many batsmen really play the swinging delivery well?" And then he winked and smiled and added, "Then I had the capacity to catch umpires napping."

There would be some who would argue that Akram cheated deliberately. That would be unfair. His action and his delivery finish were all very natural and if umpires were unaware that he was over-stepping and thereby transgressing the relevant law, can he be blamed? Like any intelligent individual he capitalised on a situation, rather like beating the lights after midnight or deserted thoroughfares as cops have gone home. In Akram's case the umpires were none the wiser.

one-day
Feb. 10,

ESPN Cricket Cup Juniors, presented by Himalaya Chyanprash, concluded on Wednesday at the Oval Maidan.

strating
proress, Jallis Shaikh (135)