



XLII

Was the batsman ready?

"In a game I was umpiring at the weekend, I could see the batter scratching his crease, clearly not ready for the next ball at a critical late stage of a close game.

The bowler, instead of walking back to his full mark, went only 2 or 3 yards and turned to start his shorter run up.

Seeing clearly that the batsman was just settling into a guard and wasn't looking up to receive the ball, I quickly said "hold on bowler", as the bowler was just entering his delivery stride.

He either ignored my request, or his momentum took him to actually bowl the ball, but as he was a slow/medium bowler, the batsman just looked up as the ball was halfway down the pitch, and he had time to hit the ball (a rank long hop outside leg stump), which was excellently caught at square leg.

I had to make a quick decision, which despite consulting my trusty "Tom Smith's" later, I'm still not sure was correct.

I decided that because I'd asked the bowler to "hold on", that the ball should be called dead, regardless of its outcome! I signalled "dead ball" to the scorers, disallowed the wicket, and had the ball replayed again.

Having made the "hold on" request, I believe that I had effectively created a "dead ball" situation?

Of course, had the batter simply let it go, or just patted it back, my decision would've courted no controversy. As a wicket fell from it (or indeed, had runs been scored from it), my decision was bound to have favoured one side.

Thankfully, both teams accepted the decision as they had seen what was happening, but of course, the spectators were confused and asked questions afterwards.

The Laws (and Tom Smith) only refer to a batsman being not ready, and pulling away from the shot, which I should subsequently call dead ball, but they don't explain my situation.

As an alternative option, should I, despite knowing the batter wasn't ready, have let the bowler bowl the ball regardless, and taken the lead from what the batter's reaction was?"

Nowhere in the Laws of Cricket is there any restriction placed on either the length of a bowler's run up or on the variability of the length of that run up. So, provided it is within the Spirit of the Game and subject to the mode of delivery remaining the same, the bowler can change his run up as he pleases. Additionally, Law 42.10 says, *"In normal circumstances the striker should always be ready to take strike when the bowler is ready to start his run up."* In other words, it is up to the striker to be ready and not up to the bowler to wait - at least, not unduly.



XLII

Law 23.4 (b) says, "*Either umpire shall call and signal Dead ball when ... (v) the striker is not ready for the delivery of the ball and, if the ball is delivered, makes no attempt to play it*". The difficulty here is what constitutes 'an adequate reason' for not being ready and how and when that can be detected. Clearly, simply not being ready is not, in itself, a reason. The reason might be some sort of distraction, or an eye problem, or to upset/annoy the bowler, or perhaps to waste time. The first two are examples of 'adequate' reasons, the latter two are not.

How should an umpire act. The current thinking is along the following lines:

If, while the ball is in play and before it reaches the striker, the striker indicates that he is not ready to receive the delivery, the umpire should call and signal Dead ball. The ball will not count as one of the over. If the striker makes an attempt to play the ball and afterwards claims he was not ready, the delivery counts as one of the over unless Wide or No ball has been called, and the striker can be dismissed in any of the usual ways if the appropriate conditions are fulfilled.

If Dead ball has been called, the umpire will need to determine whether the striker had adequate reason for not being ready. If it is decided that he did not have an adequate reason, then he should be informed of this view and reminded of the requirements of Law 42.10. No further action should then be taken unless he continues to act in this way. If he does, the umpire might consider it to be a case of time wasting. In any case, once he is certain that the striker's continued action is not within the Laws or the Spirit of Cricket, he may choose to let the bowler deliver the ball and the striker must then accept the consequences - ie the possibility of being out, either Bowled or under some other Law.

In the case in question, it would have been better to call and signal Dead ball than simply to ask the bowler to 'hold on'. The umpire has intervened and any intervention by an umpire requires that either the ball is already dead or that Dead ball is called. The call of 'hold on', while not being exactly what the Law requires, is, in my view, sufficient indication that the umpire required play to cease and the ball to become dead. Once having intervened, there can be no possibility of the ball remaining in play and, therefore, no possibility of a dismissal.

Apart from the replacement of the call of Dead ball with 'hold on', it is my considered view that the actions taken were correct.

Many bowlers have varied the length of their run up in an attempt to surprise the striker - Keith Miller being a well-known example in test cricket. Provided there is no direct attempt to **deceive** the striker or in any way to act against the Spirit of Cricket (and this decision can be made only by the umpire), the bowler should not be prevented from doing this.

It is not acceptable for the umpire to allow play to continue and then to hold some sort of post mortem to decide whether the striker is out. This possibility has been discussed at MCC and has been ruled out of order.