

## Sport

# Simpson stands by rule



SYDNEY, Jan 24 (AP): Bob Simpson, the former International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee who reported Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralitharan's bowling action two years ago, said Sunday the rule regarding "throwing" is clear and there is no need to change it.

"The law is absolutely perfect," Simpson said. "We tried to rewrite the law in the 1990s and tried to define what was a throw. What we have to be careful of is not to make it too difficult."

"To my mind there is no difference between overstepping the mark, going wide of the crease or throwing. They're all illegal deliveries."

Muralitharan was no-balled in the one-day match at Adelaide Oval on Saturday by Australian umpire Ross Emerson, who also called him three years ago in a one-dayer in Brisbane.

It was the first time this tour the off-spinner had come up against one of the three officials from the 1995-96 tour.

Darrell Hair stood himself down from Sri Lanka's matches. Tony McQuillan, who also called Muralitharan three years ago, officiated Saturday with Emerson.

Simpson, now Australia's representative on the ICC panel for suspect bowling actions, also says the current review procedure needs reforming.

He has already recommended the nine-man panel meet face to face regularly, rather than simply watch videotapes of a bowler's action and decide its legality by telephone hookup.

Along with Muralitharan,

Simpson also reported the actions of fellow Sri Lankan spinner Kumara Dharmasena and Indian Rajesh Chauhan during the Test series in India in November 1997.

To remain neutral, he was not allowed to sit in judgment on the trio.

Under ICC procedures, the Indian and Sri Lankan boards were asked to undertake remedial action with their players.

Chauhan did so, submitted the relevant tapes, was given the OK and returned to the Indian team after being stood down.

Muralitharan also received a clean bill of health but at no stage did Sri Lanka stand him down.

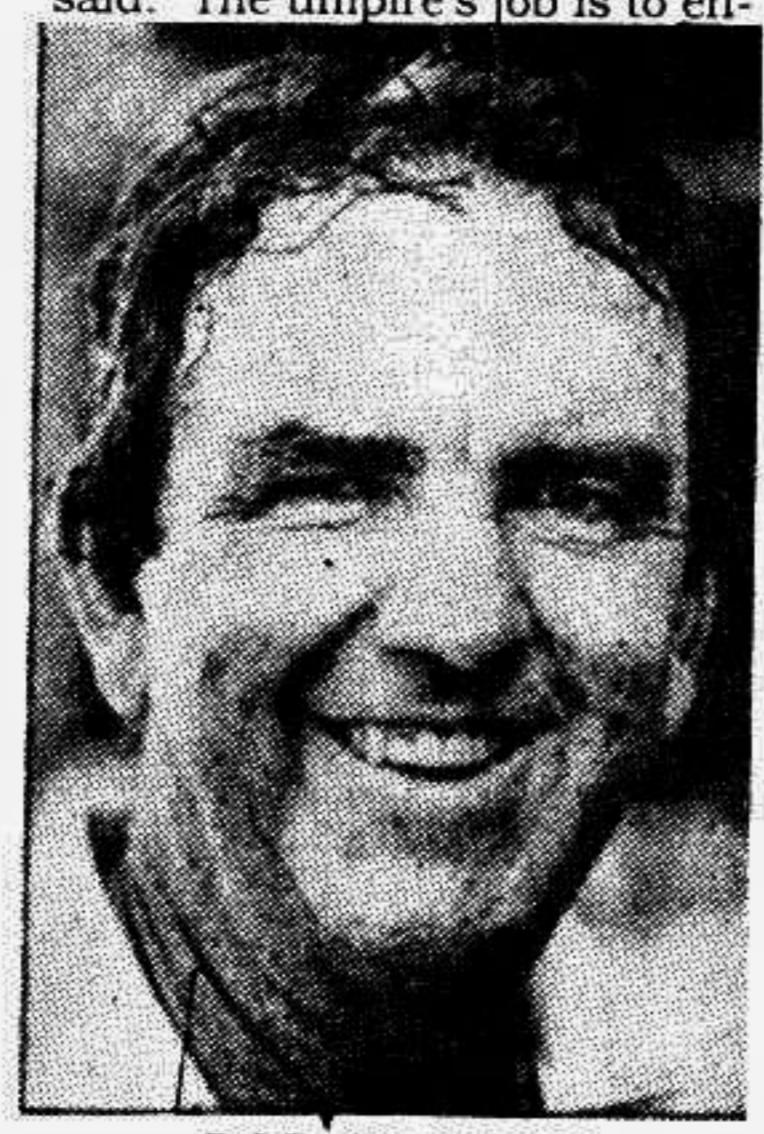
Simpson said he hadn't heard from the panel about Dharmasena, who has played since.

Last week, after media reports that Muralitharan's action had again been reported in Australia, the ICC took the extraordinary step of issuing a statement to impress that a bowler is never cleared.

"It is public knowledge that Muralitharan's action was referred to the panel in late 1997," it read.

"At that time, the panel determined on the video evidence available to them, that his action was fair. Subsequently, it has been reported that Muralitharan has been 'cleared' by the ICC."

The panel can only decide on what has happened, not what may happen. Boards and players understand that an umpire can apply Law 24.2, or the above process can be reactivated, at any time, but without an umpire prejudging the situation."



BOB SIMPSON

force the laws of the game.

"It's made more difficult by the fact that people want to bring emotion into it. It's a no-ball and doesn't conform to the rules of the game."

Muralitharan's rubbery wrist and elbow deformity make for one of the strangest bowling actions, and one of the most hotly debated.

Sri Lanka has never accepted the notion that it may be illegal, that his arm straightens upon delivering the ball, while some umpires are convinced he should be banned.

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# Understanding 'The Wall'



NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Indian cricket needs at least one Mohinder Amarnath every decade for a variety of reasons. One, to personally a maniac devotion to the game that guarantees resilience. Amarnath played his first Test against Australia in 1969-70 and scored a one-day hundred against the West Indies in 1988 nearly 19 years later. Another, to face fast bowlers abroad. In Rahul Sharad Dravid, it would not be wrong to say we have found an Amarnath for the new millennium. This can be judged by his performance in the just concluded New Zealand tour, despite the treatment meted out to him by the selectors over the last four years.

The distinctive demeanour and his boyish good looks have made him a pin-up idol in the Ravi Shastri mould and landed him with huge endorsement contracts ranging from shoes to marigold. Incidentally, he wears a T-shirt that reads: "Cricket is life. The rest is mere detail."

In what is probably his last comeback after being dropped, Dravid has displayed an amazing run of consistency in the ongoing New Zealand tour. He gave India a glimmer of a chance for victory in the Hamilton Test by scoring a mammoth 190 and followed it up with a 103 not out in the second innings of the same Test. He made it three centuries in a row by scoring a breezy 123 not out (off 123 balls) in the first one-day international and followed that up with two more brisk 50s. Dravid's performance should silence the selectors, who confidently maintained throughout last year that he was slow to adapt to the one-day game.

How the selectors mustered the drop of a player of his calibre is hard to understand considering that Dravid always fulfilled the criterion for selection in India — consistency. In 1997-98, Dravid scored 1,207 Test runs at an average of 57.47 with 12 fifties and one century.

His only weakness at the time was his inability to convert his 50s into 100s. He was dismissed four times in the 90s and twice between 80 and 100 in the period 1996-98 and yet found himself being dropped for the major one-day international tournaments in 1998 allegedly for slow scoring.

What puzzles the cricket enthusiast is how the selectors miss identifying the long-term worth of a player like Dravid. Yes, he found it difficult to rotate the strike — the ability to play with soft hands — which is crucial in one-day cricket.

Ironically, Dravid missed out on Test centuries on many occasions by attempting flamboyant strokes while the selec-

torate the quicks, being prepared to take body blows; a player who has not only the Indian fans but others as well. Dravid is all this, and much more.

Nicknamed 'The Wall,' he is most dependable in the face of adversity, has shown in his brief career a brilliant ability to counter-attack fast bowlers when his confidence-level is high and is the only player apart from Sachin Tendulkar who has better batting averages abroad than at home.

What makes Dravid special is not merely his technique but the will to succeed at the international level, much like a youthful Kapil Dev, and his appetite for runs is reminiscent of Mohammad Azharuddin in his younger days. His technique has drawn accolades from commentators like Geoffrey Boycott, Sunil Gavaskar and Richard Hadlee. Stylish and purposeful in every move, he has as elegant a stance as Kim Hughes. He prefers to play

straight, has a high backlift and plays the pull shot with a lot of flourish. The fact that he carefully nurtured and built his game around a sound technique when players have managed without it in the domestic circuit speaks volumes about his sense of inner discipline which has borne fruit in Test cricket.

Added to this is the charismatic glint in his eye that conveys the intensity of his focus on the game. That intensity, when performing well, does not come across as a sour, self-conscious inward-looking preoccupation, in the manner of Sanjay Manjrekar that indicated a dread of failure, but rather a confident awareness that one is capable of greater things.

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## Betis hold on for dour draw

BILBAO, Spain, Jan 24 (Reuters/Internet): A tight defensive display by Real Betis saw them hold on for a goalless draw in a drab Spanish first division clash with Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

Javier Clemente's side, who were missing discarded Brazilian Demilson and former Ajax winger Finidi George, made their defensive intentions clear from the start, packing the midfield and rarely looking to venture forward.

And their safety-first policy saw them clinch the point they came for as in-form Athletic found no way through.

The closest either side came to breaking the deadlock was on 20 minutes, when a bout of nerves from Betis keeper Joaquin Valerio, preferred to regular number one Toni Prats, almost gifted the home side the lead.

Valerio, attempting to beat away a cross drifting in from the left, succeeded only in deflecting the ball onto the crossbar.

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