

Sports Integrity



Report on the Pakistani cricket spot-fixing scandal

„What we want is no umpires and fair cheating all round“ – 1920s Yorkshire cricketer Roy Kilner

What happened

A reporter from *News of the World*¹ posed as a member of a Far East gambling cartel and paid a total of £ 150 000 to Mazhar Majeed, the alleged match-fixer and manager of 10 players of the Pakistani team. In return Majeed gave exact information about no-balls which will happen during the test match on August 28. This information included the name of the bowler and the exact ball and over (e.g. Amir is bowling a no-ball on the first ball of the third over of the innings.)

This conversation was video-taped with a hidden camera, and then made public by *News of the World* on August 29, after all the events described by Majeed took place on August 26 and 27 exactly as he said. When Mohammad Asif and 18-year-old Mohammad Amir bowled no-balls, they did it so blatantly that TV commentators and reporters wondered about the „mistakes“, e.g. the huge margin of overstepping.

Direct consequences

Also, the material was given to Scotland Yard, who arrested Majeed on the evening of August 28. Investigations are underway and statements have been taken from the players. Documents and mobile phones of the parties involved have been confiscated.

The three main players involved, Asif, Amir, and alleged ringleader and team captain Salman Butt, are suspended from cricket under suspicion of spot-fixing. (Cricket) Authorities demand life-time bans for involved players if the accusations prove right.

The International Cricket Council ICC is looking into the last 80 (!) matches of Pakistan's team. This also includes Pakistan's tour of Australia in March 2010 where they played extraordinarily badly and lost all their matches. This of course led to speculations about the integrity of the team. Pakistani cricketer Yasir Hameed stated that his team mates were involved in fixing almost every match.

Spot-Fixing

One or even a few no-balls are very unlikely to influence the outcome of the game. Therefore, it is a spot-fixing rather than a match-fixing scandal. Still, the integrity of the game is heavily damaged. By betting on these short passages of play or events huge amounts of money can be won, especially if one knows the result beforehand.

¹ The article incl video: <http://www.newsoftheworld.co.uk/news/924349/Cricket-in-the-dock-as-we-expose-match-fixing-scandal-England-Pakistan-Test.html>

Cricket and betting

According to a commentary on the Guardian website, cricket only rose in popularity when wagering on its outcomes became widely popular during the gambling boom of the 18th century. Ever since, cheating allegations and fixing scandals are a part of cricket². This might be due to the lack of professionalism in cricket sport in general. The fact that big money is wagered on the sport of cricket was neglected for a long time to uphold the self-image of a gentleman's sport.

Lord Condon stated in 2001³: „Corrupt practices and deliberate underperformance permeated all aspects of the game“. The most recent scandal and many other accusations lead to the conclusion that this is still the case.

As with many sports, the danger lies in Asia with illegal betting syndicates/bookmakers operating out of India and Pakistan. According to the *News of the World*, Majeed revealed how the syndicates work:

"I deal with an Indian party," he said. "They pay me for the information." Then Majeed explained how many cricket bets are placed on what he called "brackets" - events happening in a group of 10 overs. If players score well in the first three overs punters would be likely to bet on that continuing for the next seven. But if the fixed players then deliberately STOP scoring or slow down, anybody in on it can "make a killing", said Majeed. The same happens with bowlers giving away runs or throwing no-balls.

Three return to Pakistan while 4th player gets questioned

While the tour of England by Pakistan's team continues as planned, the three Pakistan cricketers questioned by police over alleged spot fixing are to fly home on Friday, September 10. Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir have agreed to return to England when required do so by the police.

Meanwhile, a fourth player, left-arm paceman Wahab Riaz, will be questioned by police on Tuesday in relation to allegations of corruption. This same player is thought to be in the squad when Pakistan's five-match one-day international series against England starts in Durham on September 10.

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² E.g. the case of Hansie Cronje: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansie_Cronje#Match_fixing

³ Lord Condon's Report on Corruption in International Cricket: http://icc-cricket.yahoo.net/anti_corruption/condon-report.php