



The switch-hit

In June 2008, MCC was asked to rule on whether the switch hit, as played by England's Kevin Pietersen in the One Day Internationals against New Zealand, was a legal shot. It decided that the shot was legal but that the implications on other Laws should be considered.

Wide

Law 25 (Wide) makes no mention of 'off' or 'leg'. A wide is defined by the striker's reach - crudely, whether he is or is not near enough to hit the ball 'comfortably' - both where he is and where he would be in a normal stance. Note particularly a normal stance, not his normal stance. A batsman's reach from whatever stance he is in is much greater on *his* offside than on *his* leg-side. In the switch-hit manoeuvre he has physically, although not technically, changed what was his leg-side into his off-side. He has therefore increased his reach on that side. 'Where he would be' has longer reach on one side; 'where he is' has longer reach on the other side. This means that fewer balls will qualify as Wides, giving a slight bonus to the bowler and fielding side. There is no case for changing the Wide ball Law, especially if he succeeds in hitting the ball.

However, in the Rules of many competitions, there is specific mention of leg-side balls. Those who write such Rules might well have to consider what change would be suitable. There may be some merit - in the 1-day game - **in this particular circumstance**, when the umpire is adjudicating on wides, that both sides of the wicket should be deemed to be the off side when the switch-hit is attempted. This would afford the bowler some measure of 'natural justice' and could be implemented through a playing regulation. Implications for other Laws would have to be thought through carefully. This is not the responsibility of MCC, which deals only in Law.

Thought was given to what should be 'normal cricket stroke' under Law 25.1(b). However, this is probably widely misinterpreted at present. It has never meant 'recognised cricket stroke'. Its intention is that the batsman is not disadvantaged by having to hit the ball in a way that is awkward with a bat - e.g. vertically or near vertically over head, with arms completely outstretched horizontally, and so on. Since the batsman is actually trying to gain an advantage for himself, that should not be a relevant issue.

Moreover, it usually is a recognised cricket stroke. The only abnormality is that the striker has transformed himself to a different sort of batsman.

Another question posed is 'should umpires be more lenient on leg-side Wides?'

There is no question of leniency in Law. The only concession he could make is to decide that a delivery is within reach when he would otherwise considered it not so. How could you instruct an umpire to revise his judgement of 'within reach' in certain cases? Would you tell him in Law to move his limit of reachability out by 10% or some such specific figure? Otherwise this new judgement would not be in accordance with Law. The only way that he can operate with credibility is - in just the same way as complying with the description



‘walking in at his normal pace’ - by establishing his judgement or reach within the definition in Law and stick consistently to this.

No ball

Law 41.7 Movement by fielders.

The only change that could be made would be to remove the embargo on such movement, but not in all cases. The unfairness of such movement is when a fielder moves during the bowler’s run-up, or immediately after, so that when the striker plays the ball the fielders are not in the positions in which he last saw them before concentrating on the delivery. The restriction applies until the ball reaches the striker. It might be a ploy by a captain. For example, knowing what the bowler intends to deliver and thereby hoping for a catch in the deep field, he instructs a fielder to move back towards the boundary before it is legal to do so. Unless it is thus premeditated, the only reason for such movement would be as a response to the sudden change in the way the striker is playing the ball, which is not going to become apparent until delivery or marginally before. Movement is allowed as soon as the ball reaches the striker anyway. Is the fraction of a second gained going to be much use? Very little, if any, advantage could be given to the fielding side by change here. Moreover it would be just at the time when both umpires have to concentrate on the striker and the striker’s wicket. It must be remembered also that such movement will often have a distracting effect and is unfair for that reason alone.

41.5 Limitation of on-side fielders.

One of the reasons for stipulating that ‘off-side/leg-side’ remain unchanged was that otherwise a field of (for instance) two slips and deep third man would suddenly become illegal. [Another was that a batsman could not escape an LBW decision by changing which side was his leg side.] It is true that the bowler and his captain should set a field to match his bowling and both this and 41.7 may be an area where initially a hand-switching striker may gain some advantage. MCC believes that the Club should see how bowling and field setting skills develop before deciding if action is necessary.

Again, timing is significant. The call of No ball is to be made with respect to the position of the fielders at the instant of delivery. This is just at the moment when the striker sees what kind of delivery he might expect and decides to switch, thus creating at that moment the situation in which a fielder might want to move. On the one hand, how would the fielders be sufficiently up with it to respond quickly enough to be effective? On the other hand, how would either umpire cope with this timing if he had to change his judgement about legality?

Leg Before Wicket

It is true that the striker is immune on what is now *physically* his off side - but that is not wholly significant. As *technically* his leg- and off- sides remain as they were, any delivery



that would have secured an LBW decision will still do so. The striker cannot escape from an LBW decision by *physically* swapping his leg- and off-sides because they do not change *technically*. On this score, the switch will neither disadvantage the bowler, nor advantage the striker.

Other comments

There may be some ways in which the batsman might exploit the situation by various clearly unfair actions, such as a naturally right handed batsman pretending to be left-handed when taking guard but switching his stance for every ball. Further, as a time-wasting ploy, the batsman may switch his stance and the bowler refuses to deliver the ball, resulting in a stalemate. The only recourse is for an umpire to intervene under Law 42.4, or possibly Law 42.18. There are plenty of areas where this could happen now.

Consider the situation when the batsmen at the wicket accept the umpires' invitation to suspend play for unsuitable light. When in the pavilion, the batting captain (who now has the say so) repudiates this decision and says he wants play to restart; once back on the field the batsmen immediately appeal against the light with conditions exactly as before, forcing the umpires to suspend play. A splendid merry-go-round. The striker may continually take guard and waste time thereby. A striker may legitimately draw back because for good reason he is not ready. The bowler may stop in his run up for a variety of legitimate reasons. Both of these legal activities could be exploited unfairly. Recently the latter happened in an international match where it was opined that the bowler did it to unsettle the striker at a crucial point in the game. These are all cases, and there are others, where the umpires have to exercise judgment about intervening to prevent descent into farce when a legitimate activity is being misused. It is clear that at lower (and sometimes, alas, not-so-lower) levels umpires do not exercise this judgment well. Nevertheless MCC cannot legislate for this, at least for the present.

At present there is nothing in Law by which this shot could be considered illegal and MCC will not be rushed into doing anything to change that. The game is continually developing; only if time shows some particular imbalance has been created will the Club consider modifying the Law.