Four Wickets in Five Balls: a Discovery

by Shahzad Ali Khan

and Charles Davis

Cricket records can be divided into various classes, sourced in different ways. The major class, which includes record innings, career runs or wickets, and many other categories, are records derived by examining traditional published scores such as those in the *Wisden Book of Test Cricket*. Another class requires additional information, drawn from match reports or unpublished sources.

An example of the latter would be hat-tricks, which are not always obvious in published scorecards and, for many older Tests, are known only through reports. A similar record in this category would be the rarely-achieved four wickets in five balls. One might expect that all instances of such a remarkable achievement had been noticed. However, the recent unearthing of a full scoresheet of a Test in 1985 has revealed a previously unknown example.

It happened in the Sialkot Test between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in October/November 1985. It is one of a number of Tests played by Sri Lanka in the mid-1980s that have remained relatively obscure, in terms of detailed information and match reports. However, a full official score for this Sialkot Test has now been obtained by Shahzad Ali Khan, from a source (Mohammad Idrees) in Pakistan,.

Shahzad examined the score closely and noticed a remarkable finish to Sri Lanka's second innings of 200 all out. Imran Khan took the last four wickets, spread over two overs, and indeed he bowled just five balls in doing so. Imran dismissed Arjuna Ranatunga and Ashanta De Mel with the last two balls of his 18th over. In his next over, Rumesh Ratnayake hit the hat-trick ball for two runs, but he was caught next ball, and Imran then had Roger Wijesuriya lbw first ball. The sequence was 0,0,0,1,W,W, (new over) 2,W,W: four wickets in five balls.

An extract from the scorebook is shown below. Note that the scorer (Abdus Sami) marks wickets not by "W" but by type: "C" for caught, "B" for bowled, "L" for lbw.

.ER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	2
KHAN.	iL.	int	":41 G	18	M.	4:2	"I:	31	20	ا:	M	:1: 22	28	M ab	32	i 33	:3· 137	38	40	
KAMAL.																				

This brings to four the known instances of four wickets in five balls in Test cricket...

MJC Allom	NZ v Eng (1), Christchurch 1929/30	0W0WWW
CM Old	Eng v Pak (1), Birmingham (Edgbaston) 1978	WWnWW
Imran Khan	Pak v SL (2), Sialkot 1985/86	WW2WW
Wasim Akram	Pak v WI (3), Lahore (Gaddafi) 1990/91	WW1WW

Apart from Imran, the bowlers all took their wickets within the same over. Perhaps this helps explain why Imran's achievement, split over two overs late in the day, apparently went unremarked. There is no real hint in the reports in the *Karachi Dawn* newspaper or the Pakistan Cricket Magazine reports of the day's play. Reporters may have been distracted by the scoring of ten runs in the intervening over, bowled by Mohsin Kamal.

New discoveries like this are now rare. No new cases of hat-tricks have emerged even as more and more detail of old Tests comes to light. (It has been noted that George Lohmann took four wicket in four balls, and five in six, in 1895-96, but that was split over two Tests, and Lohmann played other cricket matches in between. Jason Gillespie took four in five and five in seven in Ashes Tests, but split over two matches more than two years apart, and Gillespie played eleven Tests against other countries in the interim.)

It is rather pleasing to know that discoveries of such notable incidents can still be made; let's hope that there are more out there to be found.

Shahzad Ali Khan

Charles Davis

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