

## Legality of the Nottingham Test

Ian Bell's controversial run out dismissal on the third day of the Nottingham test which was subsequently revoked will be remembered in years to come more than the drubbing Indian team received at the hands of his team. It has divided right in the middle the whole cricketing fraternity on the issue of "spirit of cricket". Did Dhoni & co. do the correct thing by withdrawing the appeal? Were Strauss and Flower right in approaching the Indian captain to persuade him to do the same? Whether what happened was morally correct or not has been discussed by everyone from the television commentators, cricketing icons to the school going kids in the streets of Mumbai. Some may even have discussed the role of umpires in this whole incident. But I have serious doubts over the legality of the cricket that was played subsequent to this event in that test match.

This is what the ICC law 27.8 says about the withdrawal of an appeal:

*"The captain of the fielding side may withdraw an appeal only if he obtains the consent of the umpire within whose jurisdiction the appeal falls. He must do so before the outgoing batsman has left the field of play. If such consent is given, the umpire concerned shall, if applicable, revoke his decision and recall the batsman."*

The first clause in this law is very clear. The withdrawal of the appeal was done with the consent of the umpires Asad Rauf and Marais Erasmus, which is certainly in accordance with the law. The second clause is a bit contentious. The appeal must be withdrawn before the outgoing batsman leaves the field of play. The tea interval cannot begin before the conclusion of the last ball of the session. And in this case, conclusion of the last ball was the decision on whether Bell is out or not. Bell was adjudged 'out' by the umpire which means that while everyone else left the field of play for tea, Bell left it as a batsman who is dismissed. So technically, Bell went out because he was out and not for a cup of tea. A slightly far-fetched analogy may apply here. When Randiv infamously bowled a no ball to Sehwag who was on 99 with India needing only one run to win, the no ball ensured the win for India and whatever happened after that (which was a six hit by Sehwag) was inconsequential. Similarly, Bell was given out and he had to leave the field whether tea interval was declared or not. So whatever happens after Bell is given out is inconsequential as he is concerned. This makes the withdrawal of the appeal by MS Dhoni during the tea interval illegal. Now is there another way Bell could have continued to bat? If the umpire decided that he is not out by himself. The law 27.9 says:

*"An umpire may alter his decision provided that such alteration is made promptly. This apart, an umpire's decision, once made, is final."*

But since the decision was not at all reversed promptly, the decision stays **final**.

Now here is the interesting part of the story, which is not hard to conclude from what I have written. Since a batsman who is technically out has come out and continued to play renders the following events against the laws of cricket. To use a cliché, it's not cricket. According to the

laws of cricket, England's score in the second innings should stay at 254/4. Since they never formally declared the innings, India's second innings has no legitimacy either and this test should go down in the history as a drawn test match.

These are my two cents based on my reading of the ICC law book, a sense of cricketing history, bit of common sense and tremendous passion for Indian cricket. I rest my case here.

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