

Cricket's infamous man

By James Goyder

Australian cricketer Trevor Chappell – the youngest of the three famous Chappell brothers – played three tests and 20 One-Day Internationals for Australia. Sadly for him, he is destined to be remembered for an episode in 1981 which the then prime minister of New Zealand Rob Muldoon described as “the most disgusting incident I can recall in the history of cricket”.

New Zealand and Australia were contesting the final of the Benson and Hedges World Series, and New Zealand needed to score six runs from the final ball in order to tie the match. To ensure that the New Zealand batsman had no chance of getting the necessary elevation to lift the ball over the boundary, Chappell bowled an underarm delivery along the ground.

His action was met with universal condemnation. Trevor's older brother Ian who was commentating was heard to call out “no, you can't do that” as the delivery was bowled. As it transpired, Trevor acted on the instructions of his other brother

Greg, the Australian captain. Unfortunately for Chappell this crucial detail is generally overlooked.

Chappell was in Phuket for the cricket 6s, one of only a handful of competitive cricket appearances that the 56-year-old still makes. He is famously reluctant to discuss the underarm incident, but in the laid back atmosphere of the Phuket 6s he lost a little of his reticence.

“I don't regret it,” he said. “It probably wasn't the best thing for the game of cricket, but it seemed like a good idea at the time”.

Chappell said that there are no hard feelings between him and Greg regarding the incident, but neither of them could have predicted the furore that it would cause. The prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand joined in the condemnation, the latter describing it as “an act of true cowardice”, while the former, Malcolm Fraser, admitted it was “contrary to the traditions of the game”.

In any other sport the Chappell brothers would probably have been applauded for their ini-

tiative, but cricket still clings to the traditions of sportsmanship and fair play upon which it was founded.

Much has changed since 1981, not least in the world of competitive sport, but this erosion of the values on which cricket was founded is still a concern, particularly with the advent of a new format of the game – Twenty20 cricket.

The so called fan-friendly format of these 20-over matches has seen interest in cricket reach unprecedented levels, and Chappell thinks that the sport has benefited from the introduction of this new format.

“I think that Twenty20 is good for the game. It has brought in a whole range of new spectators who would never watch test cricket or even 50-over cricket. It's also changed the game because seeing how many runs can be scored in 20 overs has really opened peoples' eyes to how many they can score in test or one-day cricket. Now more runs are being scored it's made the game more exciting,” he said.

Despite Chappell's evident enthusiasm, he does have reser-



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ervations. “They have to be careful because the popularity of test cricket has dropped off. It's only really still popular in England and Australia. Without test cricket the game might not survive, you can't build the game from Twenty20,” he said.

These reservations did not stop Chappell from participating in a Twenty20 game in Phuket against a team led by former South African international Kenny Jackson. Underneath the floodlights at Karon Stadium the Trevor Chappell XI defeated the Kenny Jackson XI by 34 runs, with Chappell rolling back the

years to take an amazing reaction catch at mid-wicket.

Had the Kenny Jackson XI needed six runs to win from the final ball and had Chappell been the bowler, he would have been spared the dilemma of whether to bowl overarm or not – underarm deliveries were banned soon after the incident in 1981.

It is a shame for Chappell that this rule change did not come sooner. He once scored a century for his country against India. Sadly it is for the underarm delivery, rather than this formidable achievement, that he will always be remembered.