

GAME CHANGER THE DOOSRA

BY NAKO ASANO



ON THE ROOFTOP OF his family's house in Lahore, Pakistan, a young Saqlain Mushtaq and his brothers set up a makeshift cricket pitch. "We used to play with a table tennis ball," recalled Mushtaq in an interview a few years ago. He practised bowling by aiming at a line drawn on the wall. One day, by chance, the boy—who bowled off-spin (spinning the ball to the right) because he found leg-spin (spinning it to the left) too difficult—rotated his wrist as he released the ball; he watched as the ball spun off to the left. "Oh," thought Mushtaq, "this is something different."

The "something different" would come to be known years later as the doosra—meaning "other" or "second" in Urdu—when wicketkeeper Moin Khan, a teammate at the time, would call on Mushtaq to bowl his "other" delivery. Prior to the advent of the doosra, off-spin bowlers were limited to sending the ball to the right, making it hard for them to surprise batsmen. (The "googly" was invented more than a hundred years ago, so leg-spin bowlers have long been able to spin the ball either way.) The action involved in bowling

a doosra looks virtually identical to the traditional off-spin delivery, helping off-spinners more effectively confront right-handed batsmen. The difference comes from the bowler's last-second bending of the wrist, so that his palm faces inward. "Most off-spin bowlers now use the doosra as a weapon," says Ingleton Liburd, former interim coach of Canada's men's cricket team and current coach of the national under-17s.

It would take years for Mushtaq to master the doosra, eventually moving on to a tennis ball, and later a cricket ball. He made his Test debut for Pakistan in 1995 at 18 and went on to become an internationally heralded cricketer. Many of the most successful off-spinners—including Saeed Ajmal, Harbhajan Singh and Muttiah Muralitharan (perhaps the greatest off-spin bowler ever)—have made use of the doosra. But the doosra is not without its critics. Some have argued it can't be bowled without "chucking"—illegally bending and then straightening the arm to deliver the ball. In fact, most bowlers who use the doosra have been reported to the International Cricket Council (ICC) for investigation. The storm over throwing—of which the doosra was a big part—grew so intense that the ICC eventually changed the rules in 2004 to allow for a 15 degree flex, after studies revealed that no deliveries, whatever the type of bowler, were humanly possible with a completely straight arm.

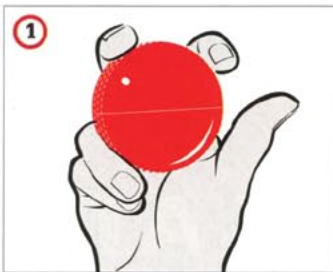
When Mushtaq, who coaches spin bowlers in England, was asked about his innovation, he responded modestly. "Allah gave it to me," he said. "I'm very pleased." **SN**

A WHOLE NEW SPIN

With a flick of his wrist, a young bowler sent the game on a wicked trajectory

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TRY THIS AT HOME KEEP BATSMEN ON THEIR TOES WITH THIS DOOZIE OF A SPINNER



- 1 GRIP** With your right hand, hold the ball with the middle and index fingers spread out along the seam.
- 2 ROTATE** Just as you're about to release the ball, bend your wrist clockwise until the back of your hand faces the batsman.
- 3 RELEASE** Flick the ball out the back of your hand. Watch as it spins to the left after hitting the ground.

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