

ICC T20 INTERNATIONAL CRICKET: BOWLING RULES, NO-BALLS, AND FREE HITS

1. BOWLING REGULATIONS

In T20 International cricket, each bowler is restricted to bowling a maximum of 4 overs per innings. This means at least five different bowlers must be used during an innings. The captain decides the bowling order and which end each bowler operates from. A bowler may bowl their 4 overs in consecutive spells or split them across the innings.

In shortened matches where the total overs are reduced due to weather or other delays, the maximum number of overs per bowler is recalculated proportionally. For example, in a match reduced to 10 overs per side, each bowler may bowl a maximum of 2 overs.

2. TYPES OF NO-BALLS

A no-ball is an illegal delivery that results in an automatic penalty. The batting team receives one extra run for each no-ball, and the delivery does not count as one of the six legal balls in the over. The bowler must bowl an additional delivery to complete the over. The following are the main types of no-balls in T20I cricket:

2.1 Front-Foot No-Ball

The most common type. A front-foot no-ball is called when no part of the bowler's front foot is behind the popping crease at the moment of delivery. For the delivery to be legal, some part of the bowler's front foot must be grounded behind the popping crease (the line located 4 feet or 1.22 meters in front of the stumps).

2.2 Back-Foot No-Ball

Called when the bowler's back foot lands on or outside the return crease during delivery. The back foot must land within and not touching the return crease for the delivery to be legal.

2.3 Waist-High Full Toss (Beamer)

A full-toss delivery that reaches the batter above waist height without bouncing is called a no-ball. These deliveries are considered dangerous. If a bowler delivers two waist-high full tosses in a single match, the umpire has the authority to remove that bowler from the attack for the remainder of the innings if the umpire considers the deliveries dangerous.

2.4 Bouncer Regulations in T20Is

In T20 International cricket, a bowler is permitted to bowl one bouncer (a short-pitched delivery that rises above shoulder height of the batter) per over. If a bowler delivers a second bouncer above shoulder height in the same over, it is called a no-ball. Any delivery that passes above head height of the batter standing upright is called a wide ball, not a no-ball.

2.5 Ball Bouncing More Than Once

A delivery that bounces more than once before reaching the batter at the popping crease is declared a no-ball under Law 21.7 of the MCC Laws of Cricket. Similarly, a ball that rolls along the ground before reaching the batter is also a no-ball.

2.6 Underarm Bowling

Any delivery bowled underarm is automatically called a no-ball in international cricket (except by special prior agreement, which is virtually never invoked). This rule was formalized after the infamous 1981 incident involving Australia and New Zealand.

2.7 Illegal Bowling Action (Chuckling)

If a bowler's arm extends beyond the permissible limit of 15 degrees during delivery, it constitutes an illegal action, commonly known as chucking. While not always called as a no-ball in real-time, umpires have the authority to call no-ball for a suspected illegal action, and the bowler may be reported and subsequently tested. If found in breach, the bowler can be suspended from bowling in international cricket until their action is remediated.

2.8 Fielding Restriction Breach

If the fielding side has more fielders outside the 30-yard circle than permitted at the time of delivery, the umpire shall call and signal no-ball.

3. FREE HIT RULES

The free hit is one of the most exciting rules in T20 cricket, introduced by the ICC during the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007.

3.1 When Is a Free Hit Awarded?

A free hit is awarded on the delivery immediately following any no-ball. Originally (from 2007), free hits were only given after front-foot no-balls. Since 2015, the rule was expanded so that all types of no-balls result in a free hit on the next delivery.

3.2 Dismissal Restrictions During a Free Hit

On a free hit delivery, the batter cannot be dismissed by any method that would credit the dismissal to the bowler. The only modes of dismissal possible on a free hit are:

- Run out
- Hitting the ball twice
- Obstructing the field

The batter CANNOT be dismissed by:

- Bowled
- Caught
- Leg Before Wicket (LBW)
- Stumped
- Hit wicket

This allows the batter to swing freely without fear of conventional dismissals, often resulting in aggressive shots and boundary hits.

3.3 Fielding Restrictions During a Free Hit

The fielding team is not allowed to change the field placement for the free hit delivery if the same batter who faced the no-ball is still on strike. However, the wicketkeeper may move back from the stumps for safety reasons.

If the batters crossed or ran an odd number of runs on the no-ball delivery (meaning the non-striker is now on strike), the field may be repositioned for the free hit. The field may also be changed if the striker changes for any other reason, such as if a batter was run out on the no-ball delivery and a new batter has arrived.

3.4 Umpire Signal for Free Hit

The bowler's end umpire signals an upcoming free hit by extending one arm straight above their head and rotating it in a circular motion. This distinctive "lasso" gesture clearly communicates to all players, officials, and spectators that the next delivery is a free hit.

3.5 Cascading Free Hits

If the free hit delivery itself is a no-ball or a wide, the free hit carries over to the subsequent delivery. The umpire will signal the free hit again. This can theoretically cascade multiple times if consecutive no-balls or wides are bowled.

3.6 Ball Hitting Stumps on a Free Hit

If the ball strikes the stumps during a free hit delivery, the batter is NOT out (since "bowled" is not a valid dismissal mode on a free hit). The ball remains live and batters may run. Since a 2023 ICC amendment (effective 1 June 2023), batters are credited with any runs completed when the ball hits the stumps during a free hit.

4. IMPACT OF NO-BALLS IN T20 CRICKET

No-balls are particularly costly in T20 cricket. A single no-ball results in:

- One penalty run added to the batting team's total
- An extra delivery that must be bowled
- A free hit on the next delivery where the batter can swing aggressively

In practice, a no-ball in T20 cricket can easily cost 7-8 runs or more, making it a bowler's nightmare in tight matches. The combination of the penalty run, the free hit, and the extra delivery makes discipline and accuracy essential for T20 bowlers.