

Home Run Called Notwithstanding Fan Interference

Baseball | Rules | Sports Law

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With less than a dozen games remaining in the Major League Baseball season, it is hard not to follow the Toronto Blue Jays. The Blue Jays sit atop of the American League Eastern Division with, at the time of the writing of this blog, a 5-game lead over the second-place New York Yankees and a “Magic Number” of 6 to clinch the Eastern Division title. The “Magic Number” refers to the combination of Blue Jays wins and Yankees losses needed to guarantee the Blue Jays a first-place finish. Accordingly, for Blue Jays fans, every game and every play matters.

In the game against the Tampa Bay Rays on 16 September 2025, a play that had the potential of making a big difference between a win or a loss occurred in the bottom of the third inning. With the Blue Jays leading 4-0, the Rays had two runners on base and power-hitter Brandon Lowe at-bat.

Lowe hit a deep fly ball to right field. The Blue Jays’ right-fielder, Nathan Lukes, tracked the trajectory of the ball to the wall and leaped, ready to make a catch. However, before the ball could land safely in his glove for an out, a fan reached across the wall, into the field of play, and caught the ball thereby preventing a possible out.

The call on the field was a three-run home run.

As Lukes lay crumpled on the warning track, having crashed heavily into the outfield wall, Blue Jays centre fielder, Myles Straw, signalled to the Blue Jays coaches that the team should challenge the home run call via video review.

The Blue Jays did so.

While the video review of the play resulted in a ruling that there was fan interference, it was also determined that Lukes would have been unable to make the catch and that the ball would have sailed over the wall for a home run. Thus, the video review was unsuccessful.

The confirmation of the home run was perplexing because it seemed counter-intuitive that a home run could be called even though the fan had interfered with the play.

In my opinion, the video review of the play should have resulted in Lowe being called “out” because Lukes was clearly well-positioned to have made the catch but for the fan’s interference.

Of course, my opinion is biased because I am a Blue Jays fan.

The real issue, however, is whether despite fan interference, a home run can be the end result.

The rules relating to fan or spectator interference can be found under Rule 6.01(e) of the [2025 edition of the Major League Baseball rule book](#). This rule provides as follows:

When there is spectator interference with any thrown or batted ball, the ball shall be dead at the moment of interference and the umpire shall impose such penalties as in his opinion will nullify the act of interference.

The “approved ruling” is that if the fan’s interference clearly prevents a fielder from catching a fly ball, the umpire shall declare the batter out.

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The “approved ruling” suggests that even if the fielder might not have caught the ball, the batter should be declared out. *Preventing* the fielder from catching the ball is enough for the out to be called. In the case of Lowe’s deep fly ball, Lukes was *prevented* from catching the ball by the fan’s outstretched arm entering into the field of play.

Commentary under the rule also strongly suggests that Lowe’s fly ball should have been dealt with as intentional interference.

This commentary, however, may have resulted in the confusing call that was made by the video review umpire. The commentary provides:

There is a difference between a ball which has been thrown or batted into the stands, touching a spectator thereby being out of play even though it rebounds onto the field and a spectator going onto the field or reaching over, under or through a barrier and touching a ball in play or touching or otherwise interfering with a player. In the latter case it is clearly intentional and shall be dealt with as intentional interference as in Rule 6.01(d). *Batter and runners shall be placed where in the umpire’s judgment they would have been had the interference not occurred.* (Emphasis added)

This statement indicates that an umpire maintains a discretion in the case of intentional interference.

However, when reading the “approved ruling” and the commentary together, the umpire’s discretion is merely a general rule, while the “approved ruling”, with its mandatory declaration that the batter is “out”, is a specific rule.

The question that should be asked by the video review umpire was whether Lukes was prevented from making the catch because of the fan’s interference? This answer should clearly have been “Yes!”

It is likely that many Blue Jays fans immediately cursed the call and that some of them believed that the ruling was made for biased reasons. It is easy, of course, for fans to not trust umpires or referees when a call is made against their team.

In my view, however, the controversial call that was witnessed in the Blue Jays/Rays game could have been prevented by Major League Baseball at the beginning of its 2025 baseball season by either refusing to permit the Tampa Bay Rays from playing their home games in a minor league stadium or requiring the Rays to install video review cameras along their outfield walls to clearly capture an incident like the one that occurred in the Blue Jays/Rays game.

The only video replay shown during the game arguably made it somewhat difficult to determine whether Lukes was prevented from making the catch, whether the fan had reached over the wall, and, whether the ball, notwithstanding the fan’s interference, would have cleared the wall for a legitimate home run.

A better camera angle may have also shown that without fan interference the ball may have hit the wall.

It would certainly be interesting to know if someone has calculated the landing spot of the ball based on its trajectory, and whether Major League Baseball has considered adding this feature to its video review protocol for similar controversial plays.

While the three-run homer reduced the Blue Jays lead to only one run, the outcome of the game was, thankfully, not impacted. The Blue Jays hung on to win the game 6-5!

In the end result, the home run called notwithstanding fan interference will live in baseball infamy and be replayed over and over again on sports broadcasts and social media. As well, Blue Jays fans will always remember the following comment made by Lukes after the game: “I do think he (the fan) was over the wall and I definitely think I would have had a chance to catch it.” A PDF version is available to download [here](#).

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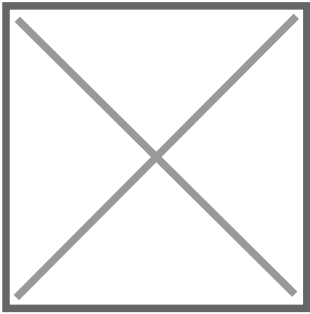
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