

Scoring a run in baseball can be all about timing (Boston Red Sox v. Toronto Blue Jays)

Baseball | Rules

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Many sports feature controversial rulings made by game officials. In Major League Baseball ("MLB"), the Toronto Blue Jays have been part of at least two highly controversial run scoring rulings which have driven fans wild.

The most infamous ruling came in game 5 of the 2015 American League Division Series between Toronto and the Texas Rangers when Blue Jays catcher Russell Martin's return throw to pitcher Aaron Sanchez after a pitch to the plate struck the bat of Shin-Soo Choo causing the ball to roll aimlessly into the field of play. While it appeared that the home plate umpire called "time" to halt play, Rangers' runner Rougned Odor, who was on third base, raced down the third base line and crossed home plate. To the outrage of Blue Jays fans, the run was allowed because under MLB rules, the play was not dead. Martin's throw back to Sanchez was a live ball, which permitted Odor to run home, despite the home plate umpire's apparent calling of a dead ball before Odor crossed the plate.

The second infamous ruling occurred on August 10, 2026 in a game between the Boston Red Sox and the Blue Jays at Rogers Centre in Toronto.

With the Blue Jays leading Boston 2-0 in the top of the 7th inning, the Red Sox had base runners at first and third base, with one out, when Cedanne Rafaela lifted an arcing, deep fly ball to Blue Jays centre-fielder Brett Bateman. Bateman made the catch and lazily threw the ball back to the infield.

Many players were confused about the number of outs and whether Bateman's catch represented the third out of the inning because the scored board, controlled by MLB officials, incorrectly showed that there were already two outs in the inning before Rafaela hit the fly ball out. Apparently, the score board was malfunctioning and showed two outs based on a prior play which, although a ground ball out, had some initially believing that Blue Jays' first baseman, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., had made a spectacular line drive catch and had made a double-play put out at second base.

In the confusion about Bateman's catch and whether there were now three outs to end the half-inning, Toronto's catcher, Brandon Valenzuela and pitcher, Simeon Woods-Richardson, began walking toward the Blue Jays dugout, while the two Boston base runners both ran from their respective bases, without retouching their original base, as soon as Rafaela had hit the ball.

Under MLB rules, a runner cannot advance on a fly ball, line drive or pop-up when the ball is caught by a fielder without retouching his base, or tagging up, before attempting to advance to the next base.

Accordingly, both of Boston's base runners were illegally advancing to their next respective bases, with the third base runner, Anthony Seigler, crossing home plate before the third out was recorded.

With the first base runner, Nick Sogard, having advanced all the way to third base on the Rafaela fly ball out, the Blue Jays infielders eventually realized that Rafaela's fly ball out only represented the second out of the inning.

The ball was then thrown to Guerrero Jr., who stepped on first base to record the third out of the inning because Sogard had left first base without having retouched the base before advancing.

With the third out now recorded, all of the Blue Jays defenders left the field of play and returned to their dugout.

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While a run was not immediately given to the Red Sox, the game's umpires caucused and determined that Seigler had scored despite never having retouched third base before advancing to home plate.

The umpires then consulted with MLB officials in New York, who reviewed the play and the MLB rules, finding that Seigler's run counted to make the score 2-1. Seigler's run counted because he had crossed home plate before the Blue Jays recorded the third out of the inning on a play that was not a "force out" at first base.

To understand why the run counted, it is important to review the applicable [MLB rules](#).

Rule 5.08 governs how a team scores.

Rule 5.08(a) provides that "One run shall be scored each time a runner legally advances to and touches first, second, third and home base before three men are put out to end the inning."

There is an exception to this fundamental rule. The exception states: "A run is not scored if the runner advances to home base during a play in which the third out is made (1) by the batter-runner before he touches first base; (2) by any runner being forced out; or (3) by a preceding runner who is declared out because he failed to touch one of the bases."

None of these exceptions applied, although it could be argued that Sogard may have been "forced out" at first base. However, under the definitions section of the MLB rules, while the term "forced out" is not defined, "A Force Play" is defined as "a play in which a runner legally loses his right to occupy a base *by reason of the batter becoming a runner*." Rafaela had not become a runner. He was out on the fly ball catch.

Under rule 5.09(c), the Blue Jays could have appealed Sogard's advance from third base to home plate without having retouched third base. This rule specifically provides that "Any runner shall be called out, on appeal, when: (1) After a fly ball is caught, he fails to retouch his original base before he or his original base is tagged."

Commentary under the rule explains that "retouch" "means to tag up and start from a contact with the base after the ball is caught. A runner is not permitted to take a flying start from a position in back of his base. Such runner shall be called out on appeal."

Under the rules, since Sogard had crossed home plate without retouching third base, he could not return to third base to retouch. But Toronto lost its ability to appeal Sogard's crossing of home plate because after recording the third out at first base the team had left the field of play. This scenario is specifically captured by rule 5.09(c)(4), which states:

Any appeal under this rule must be made before the next pitch, or any play or attempted play. If the violation occurs during a play which ends a half-inning, the appeal must be made before the defensive leaves the field.

This did not happen. So, under the [MLB rules](#), the officials made the right call to give Boston the run.

To prevent the run from counting, the Blue Jays should have thrown the ball to third base to record the third out instead of throwing it to third base.

In my view, these rules should be amended because there is now a potential for them to be deliberately abused by managers seeking to score one run, particularly in the bottom of the ninth inning or the bottom of an extra-inning. With a runner on third base, and at least one other runner on base, the rules, as currently worded, do not necessarily prevent an overly-cleverly manager, who hopes to catch the defensive team napping, by advancing multiple runners, without retouching their respective original base, on a fly ball out, without only one out, to score the winning run when the defense makes the third out at a base other than third base and leaves the field of play.

Although I can appreciate quirky rules in sport, it is better to introduce clarity and transparency to ensure that the [MLB rules](#) prevent a team from scoring illegitimate runs.

In this case, the controversy will always remain because it is unclear whether all of the Blue Jays had left field of play. According to Blue Jays Manager, John Schneider, they had not.

In a post-game interview, Schneider said:

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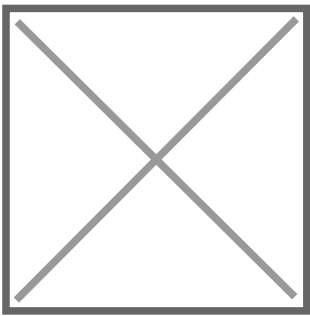
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They (the umpires) told me that all of my players were across the third-base line before [home plate umpire] Charlie [Ramos] waves off the run, which I 100% disagree with. I don't know if Vlad [Guerrero Jr.] is that fast after he got the ball at first. We weren't given the opportunity to appeal to third. Going forward, when that play happens again in the next 100 years, if it's us, we will record the lead out at third. That's the best I got.

In the result, the baseball gods prevented Boston's one run from making a difference. The Blue Jays hung on to win the exciting game, 2-1, with ace closer Louis Varland recording his career-high 25th save of the season. A PDF version is available to download [here](#).

(This blog is provided for educational purposes only, and does not necessarily reflect the views of Gardiner Roberts LLP).

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