

## **Two Instructive World Series Calls From The Past Decade**

We all know about Don Denkinger's safe call in 1985, and Reggie Jackson sticking his hip into a throw from second base in 1978. Rather than dwell on those calls, let's take a look at two key calls in the last decade of World Series play, both of which can be instructive on rules that could come into play in this Fall Classic.

### **1. Jim Joyce's 2013 obstruction call on Will Middlebrooks**

Joyce's call is without question the most memorable World Series ruling since the umpiring staffs merged in 2000. In calling obstruction on Boston's Will Middlebrooks in the ninth inning of Game 3, Joyce awarded Cardinals' Allen Craig home, sealing the 5-4 win for St. Louis. The call was correct—Middlebrooks impeded Craig's progress to the plate after a botched throw to third from Red Sox catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia. But the call is also instructive on the difference between Type A and Type B obstruction, a distinction that is often misunderstood in key moments.

The Middlebrooks/Craig play was an example of Type 2/B obstruction. Craig was obstructed after the ball was past Middlebrooks and rolling down the left field line, so the ball is not dead at the time of obstruction. The ball remains alive and in play, and the umpire will call time at the conclusion of the play and 'impose such penalties, if any, that in the umpire's judgment will nullify the act of obstruction.' The operative phrase there being 'if any.' If Craig was returned to the bag at third after being obstructed and then took off for home and was thrown out of a sizeable margin, for example, Joyce could determine that the out would have occurred with or without the obstruction, and the out would stand.

Type 1/A obstruction occurs while a play is being made on the runner. The most common example is a rundown. In Type 1/A obstruction, a one base award beyond the runner's originally occupied base is guaranteed, and the ball is immediately dead.

Players can get confused about the different types of obstruction. One such example came in the 2003 ALDS between Oakland and Boston. Miguel Tejada was obstructed rounding third base on a base hit to left field, as signaled by third base umpire Bill Welke. But the ball remained live because there was no play being made on the runner. Tejada slowed up and stopped midway between third base and home plate, and was easily tagged out by Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek. The umpires ruled Tejada out. After the game, umpire supervisor Steve Palermo explained that Welke determined, based on Tejada's actions, that Tejada would not have scored without the obstruction, resulting in the out call. If Tejada continued running and created a close play at the plate, the umpires likely would have determined that he could have reasonably scored if he had not been obstructed, and awarded him home plate at the conclusion of the play. Umpires are instructed to consider action after the obstruction in determining awards.

### **2. Chad Fairchild's 2018 Runner's Lane Interference No-Call on Cody Bellinger**

In last year's World Series, Cody Bellinger teetered dangerously close to drawing a running lane interference call on the back-end of a potential 1-2-3 double play in Game 4. On the play, the Dodgers scored their first run of the game as Christian Vazquez's wild throw to first rolled down the right field line. There are a few scenarios that can unfold when a call like this **is** made.

First, let's address the running lane: Both of the batter/runner's feet must be on/over/within the running lane, which is clearly marked on all big league baseball fields. The first-base foul line itself marks the furthest point a batter/runner can legally stray toward fair territory without being liable to be called out for interference. The runner must interfere with the fielder's ability to receive the throw (in this case, the first baseman). The throw must also reasonably be able to retire the runner. So if the ball is absolutely airtailed into right field, you're not getting the call. The runner can veer back into fair territory for the purpose of touching the base, but he isn't given the benefit of the doubt if he runs the entire way in fair territory and then happens to be arriving at the base when he interferes with the first baseman's ability to catch a quality throw.

The play with Bellinger had it all—there was also an intervening play at home plate, another quirk in the rule. Because the Red Sox made an attempt to retire the runner at home (successfully, on the force), there is an intervening play. That means that if that runner beat the throw and was safe, and then interference was called on Bellinger, the run would still count. If there is a dribbler in front of the catcher and the runner from third was crashing home, but the catcher threw to first base where running lane interference was committed, for example, the runner would have to return to third on the interference (no intervening play).

Keep an eye out for these two rules in the 2019 edition of the World Series. While they aren't common, both have impacted key scoring chances in recent years.