

The NATIONAL LEAGUE OF
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL CLUBS

CAREW TOWER
CINCINNATI 2, OHIO

September 21, 1959

Protested Game
Milwaukee at Los Angeles
September 15, 1959

In the fifth inning of the game of September 15, at Los Angeles Coliseum, Milwaukee player Adcock hit a fly ball which struck the tower supporting the left field screen. The ball dropped down and became lodged between two overlapping sections of wire mesh which form the "screen". After a conference of the umpires Adcock was awarded two bases. Milwaukee Manager Haney contended the hit should be a "home run" and made an official protest of the ruling before play was resumed. The Milwaukee Club, through Mr. Tebbetts and Mr. McHale, filed protest setting forth their reasons, within 24 hours of the completion of the game.

In their written protest Milwaukee presents four main points; (a) the ball left playing field because that part of the tower which it struck is "behind the screen outside the playing field", (b) that ball became lodged in screen after it had hit the tower outside the playing field and that not allowing a home run on such a hit "would be the same as saying that a home run which was hit into the stands and bounced back and stuck in a net or fence was not a home run", (c) that umpires based their ruling on Rule 6.09 (f) and (g) and Milwaukee directs my attention to 6.09(e) and 7.05(a). Milwaukee also asked two questions; one, "did ball hit tower above screen", two, "when ball bounced down and out of tower did ball fall on bleacher side of screen?" Note: The ball did not bounce "down and out of tower" as indicated in question No. 2 but was dislodged by outside force after being lodged in screen for at least two minutes.

While the ruling as to where the ball struck and later lodged was a question of umpire's judgment, there also was an element of ground rules application. I felt that because of the very complicated, abnormal and unusual construction of the left field screen (which necessarily is a portable screen taken down and replaced two or three times during the season) and the great importance of the game in the close pennant race, I should personally inspect the screen, establish the location the ball had lodged and examine and review the ground rules. (See note which follows decision). That was done.

The ground rules applicable are: a ball hitting "left field screen (including cables) - in play"; "through screen or sticking in screen - two bases". The screen in left field is very unusually constructed of large strips of wire mesh screen, cables, wires, pipe, pulleys, steel plates, necessary nuts and bolts, etc., all supported by two steel towers which are smaller at the top than they are near the ground. The screen which is the left field barrier (fence) is in front of those towers supported by heavy cable attached to the towers. The wire mesh screen is attached to the towers in some places but for a horizontal distance of approximately 30 inches it is 10 to 14 inches in front of the surface of the tower immediately below where the ball struck the tower. This forms sort of a wedge shaped pocket 30 inches deep with approximately 10 inch opening at top. The ball lodged in this wedge shaped opening between the screen attached to the tower and the overlapping section of screen.

As to Milwaukee's point (a) above - At no time have the ground rules which specifically provide that a ball hitting "screen or cables" as being "in play" been understood or interpreted by any N. L. umpire as excluding any part of the towers from the term "screen and cables". The words "screen and cables" as used in the ground rules mean all parts and appurtenances of the "screen". While the word "towers" is not specifically used in the ground rules, the word "cables" is used. It is significant these cables attached to the towers are for some distance located 3 ft. back of the screen (farther back of the screen than any part of the towers). If towers were considered out of the field of play

the "cables" would be, yet it is specifically provided in the ground rules that a ball hitting the "cable" is in play. Umpires advised me that in some discussions of ground rules in Los Angeles the expression "those things" (meaning towers) are the same as all that other stuff; was used and on several occasions Manager Alston has used the expression, "Consider all of it just as a solid wall". There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that any part of the tower (although some areas are a few inches back of the front of the screen) has ever been considered "out of the park" by any N. L. umpire. Accordingly, by striking the tower the ball did not leave the playing field. It did not pass "over a fence"; it did not go "into the stands" and therefore could not have been legally called a home run. Umpire Dascoli in his report of September 15, reported, "Ball never left the playing field". Umpire Smith reports, "To me ball never left the ball park".

As to Milwaukee's point (b). There is no analogy here at all because the ball definitely did not go into the stands.

As to Milwaukee's point (c). The umpires did not base their ruling on Rule 6.09(f) and (g). It was based on the ground rules supported by book rule 6.09(g).


As to Milwaukee's two questions. The answer to question one is "yes", the ball struck the tower above the screen; two, when the ball was physically dislodged from the screen by spectators shaking the screen it did fall on the bleacher side of the screen. The ball was lodged between two overlapping sections of the screen. The location of the ball could be accurately described as being lodged on the field side of a 12 ft. section of screen and on the bleacher side of the overlapping 30 inch section of screen. It actually was in a wedge shaped opening with one side of the wedge formed by wire mesh attached to tower and the other side by an overlapping wire mesh which at the top was approximately 10 inches in front of tower. This wedge shaped area was open on both ends and when ball was physically dislodged by spectators shaking the screen ^{it} could have fallen onto the playing field as easily as it fell on the bleacher side of the screen. Where it did or did not fall when dislodged is immaterial. The indisputable fact is that it was "stuck in a fence" (the fence being the screen) and remained stuck for some time until dislodged by outside force and clearly came within the provisions of the Coliseum ground rules and/or book rule 6.09(g), awarding the runner two bases.

Inquiry was made of each of the 16 National League umpires as to their interpretation and understanding of the ground rules. Without exception each of the umpires reported all parts of the towers, wire mesh screen, cables, etc. which go to make up the left field barrier were considered in the playing field and that ruling had been applied in all games played in the Coliseum in 1959. The senior American League umpire who officiated in the All Star Game at the Coliseum, August 3, advised me it was his clear understanding the ground rules in that game included all parts of the left field screen including the towers as being "in play".

To hold otherwise in the game of September 15 would have the effect of playing that game under different rules than previous Milwaukee games and other National League games have been played in the Coliseum in 1959.

It is the ruling of this office that Adcock was properly awarded two bases on the play which was the subject of protest. The protest is therefore denied and the game stands as played - Los Angeles 8 - Milwaukee 7.

WCG/akm


Warren C. Giles
President

Note: The basic principle for ground rules for the Coliseum were set by the League President in consultation with Manager Alston and Umpire Conlan prior to the opening game there in 1958 after an examination of the grounds and fences. Because of the short distance of the left field fence (screen) the League President directed that ground rules should be such that the possibility of a "home run" would be decreased rather than increased. This was the underlying motive in approving ground rules which placed the entire left field structure "in play".