

Fan interference denies Volpe tying homer as Yankees swept by Rays

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Anthony Volpe rounded the bases, touched home plate and then waited out the uncertainty like everyone else. “Just hoping for the best,” the New York Yankees infielder said. “Crazy.”

With the Yankees' season at stake, Volpe was denied a tying home run against the Tampa Bay Rays in Game 3 of their AL Division Series when a replay review determined a fan interfered with his drive to deep left field Wednesday night.

The swing of emotions came nearly 30 years to the day after young Yankees fan Jeffrey Maier reached over the right-field wall at Yankee Stadium on a ball hit by Derek Jeter in the 1996 American League Championship Series against Baltimore. With no replay system in place back then, the home team benefited from umpires calling it a home run instead of interference, and New York went on to win the World Series.

This time, the Yankees wound up losing 4-3 by the very run that was taken off the board and had their season end in a three-game sweep.

“I mean, we lost,” Volpe said. “That’s what we’re dealing with now. That’s just what happened.”

Replay umpire Malachi Moore made the call on Volpe's sixth-inning drive in Major League Baseball's Replay Center, and players and managers on both sides mostly agreed the right decision was made.

“I thought they got it right,” New York skipper Aaron Boone said. “When he hit it, to my eye looking out there, I was a little concerned right away because it felt like something — I wasn’t sure. And then seeing the replay and seeing it unfold, I thought they did the right thing.”

With rookie George Lombard Jr. on base — Austin Wells would have been as well if not for a successful ABS challenge by the Rays — Volpe turned on right-hander Griffin Jax’s 96 mph sinker and hit it 357 feet to left field. It was a matter of inches as to whether a fan

reached over the fence and interfered with the ball or it would have cleared the wall without help.

“He almost had a big home run,” injured teammate Aaron Judge said. “Off the bat, I liked the chances.”

The play was initially called a two-run homer that would have tied the score at 4 with two outs in the sixth. But a lengthy video review determined a fan reached over the wall to catch the ball as Rays left fielder Victor Mesa Jr. tried in vain for a leaping grab.

“It was interference,” Mesa said in Spanish. “I believe I might have even been able to get to that ball. Not that it matters whether we won or lost. Well, it’s in the past now. I think they could have even called an out, because I was right there. Everything happens for a reason. It was kind of an in-between call.”

Spectator interference became the ruling, and Volpe was awarded an RBI double that scored Lombard from first base, trimming Tampa Bay’s lead to 4-3.

“I don’t know if he would have caught it or not caught it, the guy would have scored or not,” Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "Our replay official Nick (Rogers) said the runner had passed second base at the point where the ball hit the fan’s wrist or hand, and makes sense why they awarded him home."

There was another slight delay after some fans in left threw debris onto the field, and Spencer Jones then struck out against Jax to end the inning.

The fan who reached

out to catch the ball was escorted out of Yankee Stadium by security and police.

“After viewing all relevant angles, the Replay Official definitively determined the spectator interfered with the ball over the field of play. The ball would not have left the playing field nor would it have been caught. The call is OVERTURNED, there was spectator interference and no home run. Additionally, the Replay Official scored one run and placed the batter-runner at 2B,” MLB said in a statement from the Replay Center.

Judge knew once he saw the side-angle replay that it was fan interference. He and his teammates had to deal with that reality.

“You go from a tie game to down one,” said starting pitcher Max Fried, who gave up a two-run homer to Mesa in the top of the sixth. “(Volpe) made a great swing, and it’s just the way the game goes sometimes. It’s unfortunate because that changes the game.”

AP Sports Writer Eric Nunez contributed to this report.



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