



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on June 4, 2010

Umpire Robs Pitcher of Perfect Game, but Anger Quickly Fades

Anyone watching ESPN on the night of Wednesday, June 2, was delighted by the treat of being TV-transported to Detroit for the ninth inning of the Major League Baseball game between the Tigers and the Cleveland Indians.

Detroit pitcher, Armando Galarraga, was three outs away from completing a perfect game — 27 batters up, 27 batters down, no walks, no hits, no errors.

With two outs in the ninth and all the Detroit fans up and cheering, Cleveland's Jason Donald hit a bouncer towards the gap between first and second base. With the first baseman after the ball, the pitcher was required to leave the pitcher's mound and cover that base to receive the resulting throw — and Galarraga was there.



Umpire Jim Joyce was there, too.

The ball came in and so did the sprinting Donald. Everyone - fans, players, viewers - were seized ecstatically at the presumed thought of having witnessed a gem of a game and a historical moment. That is, they were ecstatic until the ball was in the glove of Galarraga and Donald crossed the bag. It was then that the umpire's outstretched arms indicated "safe," and disappointed groans replaced the previous exultation. Players' faces showed disbelief. Happy, upraised arms collapsed to rest on heads now bearing frowns and open mouths. Was he actually safe after all? This game was not to be perfect?

Galarraga wore a slight child's smile as he looked at Joyce. But not so his teammates, and not so his manager Jim Leyland. He came out for a few words with Umpire Joyce, who defended his call. After the game, the replay was seen by many in the park, the players' clubhouses, and the nation, and it was clear: The throw was in time, Donald was out and Jim Joyce had blown it.

A respected umpire, Joyce has been working in the major leagues since 1989, including two All Star Games, 11 various playoff games, and two World Series. Probably no one loves baseball the way an umpire must. Jim Joyce asked for the replay in the umps' room, and upon seeing it, realized immediately what he had done: "It was the biggest call of my career, and I kicked the [stuff] out of it," he bitterly lamented. By all accounts Jim Joyce was distraught, pacing. "I just cost that kid a perfect game."

Said Hall of Fame umpire Doug Harvey, "When you have a play where the first baseman fields a ball to his right and the pitcher covers first, the thing you focus on is watching the fielder pick up the ball and make the throw, and then you turn your eyes to first base and watch and listen for the ball hitting the pitcher's glove. At the same time you are watching the runner, but it is the sound of the ball hitting the



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glove that will trigger the call.

“I would imagine the noise of the crowd was so great, in view of the circumstances, that the umpire had trouble hearing the ball hit the pitcher’s glove.”

Then began what might be termed a happy ending after all. It started with the disappointed but classy Armando Galarraga biting his tongue and returning to finish his “one-hit” winning game. This doing the right thing continued afterwards with Jim Joyce. Before even showering he sought out the pitcher to apologize. Galarraga admired the gesture and the apology, something Doug Harvey said umpires would have never done in the old days. Manager Leyland caught the mood also, saying that although what happened was a shame, everyone makes mistakes and doubtless Joyce, a fine umpire, was feeling the worst of all.

On Thursday, Jim Joyce had the home plate assignment for the afternoon game. When he took the field, most of the crowd gave him a hand, bringing him to tears. And he received the Detroit lineup card from... Armando Galarraga. For his part, Galarraga was awarded an unexpected Chevy Corvette from a local dealer.

The *Detroit Free Press* reported that meanwhile, outside the park:

A stand that sells authentic game-worn jerseys sold-out of the two Galarraga jerseys that it had in stock on Thursday. Each one cost \$265.

The stand also sold three signed balls at \$50 each, which was impressive, considering the stand didn’t even offer any Galarraga balls the day before.

Because, well, there wasn’t any demand for them.

And at the park the next day, one eloquent sign held aloft by a Detroit fan spoke the general feeling: “We all know it was perfect.”

Photo of Armando Galarraga: AP Images



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