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McDowell Balks And Loses in 12th

By JOSEPH DURSO, Special to The New York Times
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It took 4 hours 7 minutes on the clock and 12 innings on the field, but the Mets found a new and absolutely maddening way to lose a game today. With runners on second and third base, nobody out and the Mets and Los Angeles Dodgers tied at 3-3, a balk was called against Roger McDowell and the winning run was waved home by the umpire.

But if you think that was maddening, this is how the balk was set up: McDowell came into the game in the bottom of the 12th and walked the first batter on four pitches. The batter was Dave Anderson, who was hitting .132. Then Willie Randolph tried to bunt twice, fouled off both pitches and finally atoned by bouncing a high chop over third base for a single.

There was more. With John Shelby batting and also bunting, Barry Lyons tried to pick Anderson off second base and nearly did. But the ball hit Anderson on the leg and caromed into center field, and the Dodgers had runners on second and third with nobody out. The stage was set.

With the infield and outfield drawn in and the game on the line, McDowell went to two balls and one strike on Shelby, took his stretch and fired one more time. Suddenly there was Bob Davidson, the home-plate umpire, waving his arms and calling, "Balk." Anderson trotted in from third, Davey Johnson stormed out to argue, the umpires stood fast and the Mets lost a memorable one to the Dodgers, 4-3.

To balk or not to balk, that is the question. The balk was called because McDowell apparently didn't pause in his motion and make the "discernible stop" specified by the rules. He was called for the same thing Saturday night, but the batter hit the ball and was safe at first. No Deceit Intended

"I hate to see a game ended by an umpire's call like that," Johnson said. "It's a fine line; it's a judgment call. He has every right to call it. But we're having enough trouble, as it is. We're not trying to deceive anybody. The intent of the rule is to keep you from deceiving the runners. But they've got men on second and third, and nobody's going to steal a base.

"Bob Davidson leads the league in calling balks, at least for us."

"You hate to call it," Davidson said. "But he bounced his hands. It wasn't even borderline. That's what the rule's for. He's got to come to a complete stop.

"Davey came out and said, 'Why don't you let them beat us?' But it's not up to me."

"All in all," Johnson said later, setting a club record for understatement, "it wasn't a good day."

It wasn't a good day in any direction. Johnson himself missed the first two innings because he was undergoing tests at Centinela Hospital for a chronic back condition. Johnson Has Ruptured Disks

"They found I had two ruptured disks," he reported after the game. "I've been having a lot of pain. But I was examined by Dr. Robert Watkins, who operated on Dave Winfield, and he took hundreds of pictures from all angles and found the ruptured disks."

Johnson left with his team for San Francisco afterward, but said he would "review it all" with Dr. Watkins by telephone Monday. He said he did not know if he would be forced to leave the team for surgery.

These are hard times for the Mets. They have lost four series in a row. And they were nearly beaten this afternoon by Fernando Valenzuela, and that would have been a rare one because he has not beaten anyone in 18 starts going back to last June.

Not only that, but Valenzuela outpitched Dwight Gooden, who has lost only once to the Dodgers in his six-year career and never in Dodger Stadium. But Valenzuela was foiled, and Gooden was spared, by one swing of the bat in the seventh inning.

The Dodgers were leading, 3-1, and the swing was by Gregg Jefferies, pinch-hitting with Darryl Strawberry on third base, Tim Teufel on second, two down and Tim Crews on the mound. Jefferies looped the ball behind third base, and it fell just inside the chalk for a double, two runs and a tie. The score was still tied five innings later when McDowell became the ninth pitcher in the game and threw four wide ones to Anderson.

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