

# Sometimes sports-rule lawyering comes true: The strikeout with only one thrown pitch

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Some time ago, I engaged in some sports-rule lawyering to try to come up with a way the losing team could manage to salvage a win without any remaining at-bats. It involved invoking a lot of obscure rules, but astonishingly one of the rules that I called upon was actually put into effect a few days ago. The Crawfish Boxes provides an entertaining rundown of the sequence of events. Here is the boring version: During his plate appearance, Vinnie Catricala was not pleased with the *strike* call on the first pitch he received. He exchanged words with the umpire, then stepped out of the batter's box to adjust his equipment. He did this without requesting or receiving a time-out. The umpire repeatedly instructed Catricala to take his position in the batter's box, which he refused to do. The umpire then called a strike on Catricala, pursuant to rule 6.02(c). Catricala, failing to comprehend the seriousness of the situation, still did not take his position in the batter's box, upon which the umpire called a third strike, thereby rendering him out. You can watch it for yourself. (Any discussion of this incident cannot be carried out without somebody referring to this Bugs Bunny cartoon, so there, I've done it so you don't have to.) I noted back in 2011 that the conventional way of implementing the automatic strike is for the umpire to direct the pitcher to throw a pitch, and to call it a strike no matter where it lands. This rule was revised in 2008 so that the umpire simply declares a strike without a pitch. This removes the deadlock situation I referred to in my earlier article, where the umpire instructs the pitcher to deliver a pitch, and the pitcher refuses. (The rule change also removes a bunch of wacky edge cases, like, "What if the pitcher throws the pitch as instructed by the umpire, and the batter jumps into the batter's box and hits a home run?") The revised rule 6.02(d)(1) specifically enumerates the eight conditions under which a batter is permitted to step out of the batter's box, none of which applied here. (Note that the rules of baseball stipulate that unless the umpire has granted Time, batters step out of the batter's box at their own risk. The ball is still live, and a pitch may be delivered.)

Major League Baseball revised the rule in order to speed up the game, accompanying the rule change with instructions to umpires to enforce rules more vigilantly. Time between pitches is by far the largest chunk of wasted time in a baseball game, totalling well over an hour in a

typical game. If you add the time between batters, you end up with over half of the elapsed time spent just waiting for something to start.

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