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## Law 33

### 33-A Handled the ball versus Obstructing the field

In most cases when a batsman wilfully handles the ball, he will disadvantage the fielding side in some way. If he is given out on appeal, how does the umpire decide whether he is out Handled the ball or Obstructing the field?

It is true that the Law does not lay down clear boundaries between these two situations. The difference lies in the intent.

To be out Obstructing the field, either umpire (or if necessary the umpires together after consultation) must consider that the batsman has made a wilful attempt to obstruct or distract the opposing side by word or action. Such action could include handling the ball in some way, but the use of a hand not holding the bat would only be the *means* by which the attempt is made.

To be out Handled the ball, it is the wilful handling itself which contravenes the Law, with no particular intention of obstructing the fielding side.

The striker 'handling the ball' in receiving it from the bowler may do so to prevent the ball from hitting his wicket. He is out Handled the ball. If, however, the ball had already touched his bat and the wicket-keeper or a close fielder is making an attempt to catch it, then pushing it away with his hand will be preventing a catch and he will be out Obstructing the field.

Between these two clear cut extremes, there will be cases where it is difficult to be sure that the action was 'a wilful attempt to obstruct. . . .'

In one case where the batsman's purpose in handling the ball may or may not be evident, the Law removes the necessity for the umpires to consider intent. In Law 37.4, it could be well be a 'free' hand which, without consent, is used to return the ball in play to a fielder. This section of Law speaks only of 'bat or person'. The batsman is then out Obstructing the field, since a hand not holding the bat is part of his person.

Neither method of dismissal is credited to the bowler. Both allow runs completed before the offence to be scored, except in the case of a catch being obstructed. Then also it is always the striker who is out. If the wilful handling of the ball interferes with an attempted catch, however, it will usually be clear that it was the batsman's aim to do so. The umpire will not have difficulty in adjudging this to be Obstructing the field. In other situations, unless he is certain that it was a wilful attempt to obstruct, he will consider the batsman out Handled the ball. Intention can be difficult to judge; handling the ball is a fact.

It must be remembered that the wilfulness of the action is to be discounted, if the batsman handles the ball in play with the consent of the other side, or to avoid injury.

[Law reference: 33.1, 37.1]

### 33-B Scoring runs after handling the ball

Law 33.2(i) states that a batsman is not out if he handles the ball in order to avoid injury. If he does this, and runs are then taken, would they be allowed and if so, how should they be scored?

The umpire must be satisfied that the handling of the ball was strictly to prevent injury to the batsman, and not an attempt to propel it any distance into the field. If after the striker has fended off a delivery in this way, the batsmen start to run then, providing the umpire is satisfied that the batsman was genuinely defending himself from injury, those runs will be allowed. If there has been no contact with the bat before the incident, they should be scored as Leg byes.

If after the striker has received the ball, a batsman subsequently uses his hand to fend off

the ball, providing the umpire is satisfied that this action is *strictly* to avoid injury, there is nothing in Law to prevent the batsmen from taking runs, or continuing runs in progress. Some batsmen might nevertheless consider it fairer to refrain from doing so. Note, however, that if the umpire is not satisfied as to the batsman's intention, he should consider whether the action could be construed as obstructing the field.

[Law reference: 33.2(i)]

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