
Law 36

36-A General guidance on ‘whether the ball would have hit the wicket’

What follows is only **general guidance** on judging whether the ball would have gone on to hit the wicket, if it had not been intercepted. More detailed guidance can be found in the MCC Open Learning Manual in section d of the commentary on Law 36. This is on pages 36-2 and 36 –3.

Law 36.1(e) requires an affirmative answer to the question “But for the interception, would the ball have hit the wicket?” in order to complete the requirements for the striker to be dismissed Leg before wicket. When assessing whether the ball would have gone on to hit the striker’s wicket, it has to be assumed under Law 36.2(b) that **the path of the ball before interception would have continued after interception**, irrespective of whether the ball might have pitched subsequently or not.

Obviously the height of the initial interception of the ball also has to be taken into account in assessing whether the onward path of the ball after interception would have taken it on to hit the striker’s wicket. Another important factor will be the distance from the striker’s wicket at which the interception occurred. This together with the height would give some indication whether or not the continued path of the ball would take it over the top of the wicket. The Law does not require any judgment as to what might have happened if the ball had pitched after any interception, so the vagaries of the pitch are eliminated from the equation.

The assessment of the continued path of the ball when it hits the striker’s person full pitch is much easier than when the ball pitches prior to interception. The umpire will know the angle of delivery in relation to the two wickets. He will be able to observe any lateral movement in the air, judge the height at interception and establish how far from the striker’s wicket the initial interception took place. He will have a longer period in the flight of the ball to make his assessment, with no movement off the pitch to contend with.

The case of the ball pitching before interception is more difficult. The umpire will still know the angle of delivery, will observe any lateral movement in the air, judge the height at interception and establish how far from the striker’s wicket the initial interception took place. This latter point is vital in both cases. The distance the ball would have had to travel will be an essential ingredient in judging whether or not the ball would have hit the striker’s wicket. He will also have to take into account both the lateral and vertical movement in the air prior to pitching. However, he has less time to decide the final onward path of the ball. His decision on that final path rests on the time between the ball pitching and the initial interception. This period of time can be extremely short. The longer the period is, the easier it will be for the umpire to make his judgment.

There will be occasions when the umpire will have difficulty in deciding whether the interception took place before or after the ball pitched. If he is not sure, it follows that he will not be able to determine the further path of the ball and, if he cannot be sure that the ball would have gone on to hit the wicket, he cannot support the appeal.

In both cases the crucial question is, “Would the ball have hit the wicket?”

[Law reference: 36.1(e), 36.2(b)]
