

John Feinstein

The NEW YORK TIMES Bestselling Author of LAST SHOT



CHANGE-UP

MYSTERY AT THE WORLD SERIES

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Doyle rocked and threw his first pitch to Varitek. It was, Stevie noticed on the scoreboard a moment later, a 79-mph fastball. Varitek jumped on it, and it was clear the moment it left the bat that Doyle's luck had finally run out. The ball screamed toward the gap in right-center field. As soon as it landed between Dukes and right fielder Austin Kearns, the crowd roared. By the time Dukes ran the ball down and got it back to the infield, Varitek was standing on third and Stevie could feel the park literally rocking underneath his feet.

"He threw into coverage once too often," Solomon said.

Acta was walking slowly to the mound. The no-hitter now gone, he instantly waved to the bullpen for his closer, Joel Hanrahan.

"Probably too late," Svrluga said as Hanrahan began to jog in. "Best-case scenario, they hold them to one run here and get the game to extra innings."

Doyle had opted to wait on the mound until Hanrahan arrived, instead of leaving right away the way most pitchers did when coming out of a game. When Hanrahan walked onto the mound, he handed him the ball, said something, and began walking off the mound. As he did, the entire stadium stood and cheered.

"At least the Red Sox fans appreciate the effort," Susan Carol said.

"Now they do," Stevie said, feeling very sad for Doyle and

the Nats. "Now it's okay because they're about to tie the game."

Doyle received handshakes and hugs all around in the Nationals dugout. Hanrahan finished his warm-up pitches and looked in at J.D. Drew, the Red Sox right fielder.

Drew had power, although it was more the line-drive-double type of power than home-run power. The Nationals moved the infield in, positioning all four of them on the grass so that they could throw home to try to get Varitek out on a ground ball and keep the Red Sox from tying the game.

"No pinch runner for Varitek?" Susan Carol asked. "Wouldn't they want more speed at third base?"

"They're thinking if they tie it, they don't want their starting catcher on the bench in extra innings," Svrluga said.

"Team that wins the toss usually wins in overtime," Solomon said, causing everyone to look at him as if he were from Mars.

Hanrahan looked in for a sign and threw a strike, Drew taking all the way. The next pitch produced a ground ball right at third baseman Ryan Zimmerman. He scooped it on a short hop, glared at Varitek for a second, as if daring him to leave third base, then threw across the diamond to get Drew out at first by a step.

"Still alive," Susan Carol said softly.

Stevie realized that he was also relieved to see the lead still intact. He had been so caught up throughout the game thinking about what was going on with Susan Carol that he had almost lost track of the fact that he might be witnessing history. Now, with the no-hitter gone, he wanted very much

to see Doyle at least get the win and to see the Nationals even the series at one game apiece.

Red Sox manager Terry Francona had decided to go to his bench, bringing up Julio Lugo to pinch-hit for short-stop Nick Green.

The whole stadium was standing now, wanting Lugo to at least get the tying run in with less than two outs. Hanrahan, knowing that Lugo had home-run power, worked carefully, falling behind 2-1 before Lugo fouled a pitch off with a vicious swing.

“He just missed hitting that pitch a long way,” Maske said.

Hanrahan was like most relief pitchers in that he never used a windup, just pitching out of the stretch because he often came in with runners on base. Now he stretched and threw again.

Lugo reached out for the pitch and hit a fly ball to right field. It wasn’t deep, but it wasn’t shallow. Austin Kearns took a step back and then came in to make the catch, clearly trying to get himself in position to make a throw to home plate. Varitek tagged up, Kearns made the catch, and Varitek took off for home.

“This is going to be close,” Stevie heard Susan Carol say, even over the din of the crowd.

Kearns’s throw was strong but just a little bit off-line on the first-base side of the plate. Varitek started to slide as the ball was arriving, and Nationals catcher Wil Nieves grabbed the ball out of the air and dove back in, trying to get the ball on Varitek before Varitek got to the plate.

Varitek, Nieves, and the ball—in Nieves’s glove—

appeared to arrive all at the same moment. Nieves landed almost on top of Varitek's legs, applying a tag as Varitek slid into home. Plate umpire John Hirschbeck stared at the two men for a moment, then pointed at Nieves's glove, which he was holding in the air to show that he still had the ball. Hirschbeck's arm came up in the air, and Stevie thought he heard him say, "You're out!" even though he couldn't possibly have heard him from so far away in the cauldron of noise. Nevertheless, the arm raised in the air was enough. It was a double play. Varitek was out. The game was over. Somehow the Nationals had won, 1–0.

As soon as Hirschbeck gave the out call, Susan Carol jumped from her seat, yelling, "They did it, they did it!"

Stevie had also jumped from his seat and, instinctively, he turned to hug Susan Carol. She did the same thing. Then, almost in midhug, they both stopped, awkwardly pushing back from one another.

The reaction of the other writers around them was considerably more subdued: they were clearly surprised by the sudden ending but not emotional. Stevie had covered enough sporting events to know that journalists taught themselves to try not to show emotion even if they felt it.

Seeing that she and Stevie were the only ones who appeared excited, Susan Carol calmed down quickly. "That *was* an amazing game," she said, as if defending herself.

"Yes, it was," Stevie said, trying to sound cool and restrained—even though he didn't feel the least bit cool.

Then they gathered up their notebooks and followed everyone else in the direction of the clubhouses.