

# Calls to Die For

*A new revelation of an ancient slight can serve as a model to memorialize officiating gaffes*



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**T**hose of you still awaiting delivery of a recent issue of the *Journal for Papyrology and Ancient Epigraphy* may have missed the revelation that the illustrious history of blown calls by referees can now be traced back at least 1,800 years. That's after a historian, as reported by the journal, was able to decipher the tombstone of a

Roman gladiator who was killed in a sword battle that many years ago. The drawings on the tombstone depict the demise of the gladiator, named Diodorus, who was under the impression that his opponent had surrendered while lying on the ground. Diodorus spared his fallen opponent's life, only to have the referee allow his opponent to get back up and plunge a sword into Diodorus. It is perhaps the historical equivalent of a boxer thinking he had knocked out his opponent, only to have the referee rule it a slip. Diodorus' fans, friends or family wanted to make sure that the referee was called out for all of posterity, so they depicted the scene on Diodorus' tombstone, along with the inscription "fate and the cunning treachery of the [referee] killed me."

Friends and fans of modern-day athletes looking to take a final poke at the official who so wronged their heroes may want to take note. For instance, fans of Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Gallaraga may want to commission an artist to depict Gallaraga's foot hitting first base for what would have been the 27th straight out against the Cleveland Indians in 2010 if not for a blown call by umpire Jim Joyce (no, not *that* James Joyce). The drawing could be accompanied by the inscription "he led an 'almost perfect' life"—though Gallaraga's magnanimity in the face of Joyce's gaffe may deter his friends from going all Diodorus when Gallaraga dies.

Supporters of boxer Jack Dempsey, who lost a fight to Gene Tunney in 1927 after ring referee Dave Barry's (no, not *that* Dave Barry) legendary "long count," that allowed Tunney to get off the canvas despite having been down for at least 13 seconds, could put this on Dempsey's headstone: "Can't you keep the clock going for me?"

In the 1986 FIFA World Cup semifinal between Argentina and England, a goal that was banged in by the hand of Diego Maradona was allowed to stand when the referee completely missed the play. Maradona attributed

the goal to the "hand of God." Perhaps English goalkeeper Peter Cilton should consider this for his epitaph: "I hope it's not the hand of Maradona that awaits me."

Tony Tarasco was the Baltimore Orioles' right fielder who was all set to catch Derek Jeter's fly ball in the 1996 American League Championship Series when Yankees fan Jeffrey Maier leaned over into the field of play and caught the ball. Umpire Rich Garcia famously, and incorrectly, ruled it a home run. Maybe Tarasco can take one last swipe at Maier and Garcia by depicting the scene on his tombstone, with the accompanying message: "Please don't reach in."

Philadelphia 76ers Head Coach Doug Collins, as a member of the 1972 U.S. Olympic basketball team, was one of the victims of appalling officiating at the end of the U.S.-Soviet Union Olympic basketball final in Munich in which

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the Soviet team was given two "do-overs" in the last three seconds of the game—after Collins had put the U.S. ahead by a point. I'm sure Collins' entire team would be pleased to commission a mural of various officials—some who had no business being there—

conferring at the scorer's table with the inscription on Collins' headstone: "Can I please get two more chances?"

Most recently, in July, the Pittsburgh Pirates were tied for first place when they played a 19-inning game against the Atlanta Braves. The Braves won when Julio Lugo was ruled safe at home by umpire Jerry Meals, despite the fact that Pirates' catcher Mike McKenny had clearly tagged him well before the plate. The Pirates' season promptly went into the tank. The play at the plate could be depicted on a monument outside PNC Park in Pittsburgh with the simple dedication: "Here lies the 2011 Pirates' season. Thanks, ump."

Each of these gaffes is certainly preserved in our digital archives. But we could make things more interesting for future historians by following in the footsteps of the friends of Diodorus and setting them in stone. ■

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