

Not safe at home: Tag plays at the plate in major leagues have highest injury rate, study finds

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Tag plays at home plate have the highest injury rate in professional baseball, occurring 4.3 times more often than other base-running plays, according to researchers at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center.

"The current Major League Baseball (MLB) rules have a loophole that allows catchers to stand in the baseline and block the plate if the ball is being thrown home, which allows for collisions," said Daryl Rosenbaum, M.D., [sports medicine](#) physician at Wake Forest Baptist and lead author of the study. "Over the years, whether intentional or not, this oversight has permitted a different standard of play at home plate than other bases."

The research is published in the current online edition of the *International Journal of Sports Medicine*.

To reduce the number of home-plate collisions in an otherwise limited-contact sport, Rosenbaum suggests that the major leagues adopt the collegiate rule, which prohibits defensive players, including catchers, from blocking a base, including home plate.

A similar proposal has been proposed by the MLB owners and is awaiting approval by the players and umpires.

"Making this change would protect both catchers and baserunners,"

Rosenbaum said. "The runner wouldn't be able to run into the catcher to knock the ball loose and be called safe, and the catcher would have to stand behind or next to the baseline rather than in it to tag the runner out."

In the study, the researchers looked at three types of MLB plays from 2002 to 2011—non-force putouts by a catcher at home plate (Catcher Tag Out), groundball force outs at second base with less than two outs (Double Play Attempt) and outfield assisted non-force putouts of runners attempting to advance to second or third base (Outfield Assist 2nd/3rd) ,which served as the control play.

This data was cross-referenced with 2002 to 2011 disabled lists to see if an involved player went on the disabled list the day of or day after the play. An online search for each match determined if the injury was attributable to that play.

The findings showed that the rate of injury for Catcher Tag Out was 4.3 times higher than the control play, Rosenbaum said. The Double Play Attempt was statistically even with the Outfield Assist control play.

Nearly three players per year were injured severely enough in tag plays at the plate to be put on the 15-day disabled list, according to the study findings. Using the average MLB player salary for 2011 of \$3.1 million, injuries from [home plate](#) collisions cost teams an average of approximately \$2.3 million annually.

"That's just the financial impact," Rosenbaum said. "More difficult to quantify but also worth considering are the players' health and the effect of their absences on their teams' performance.

"I don't think fans go to baseball games to see collisions and I don't think if you remove them it would change the inherent nature of the game," he

added. "Why are collisions allowed in this one scenario when they're not really part of the game?"

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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