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Baseball dangers Foul balls: Not always enough time to react: Spectators risk major injury --- perhaps death --- at big league ballparks.

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Abstract: Reva Ezell, a longtime Braves fan from Atlanta, was hit in the face by a foul ball off the bat of Brian McCann at Turner Field last September, just like Braves minor league manager Luis Salazar was struck in the Braves dugout at Disney World in spring training. [...] baseman Chipper Jones said his four sons either sit in his luxury suite or occasionally in the SunTrust seats directly behind home plate, protected by the screen.

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Full text: The similarities are eerie.

Reva Ezell, a longtime Braves fan from Atlanta, was hit in the face by a foul ball off the bat of Brian McCann at Turner Field last September, just like Braves minor league manager Luis Salazar was struck in the Braves dugout at Disney World in spring training.

Like Salazar, she was fortunate she wasn't killed.

Ezell lost 95 percent of her vision in her right eye. Salazar, who lost consciousness after he was hit, lost his left eye altogether.

Now both have found their way back to the game. Salazar is managing again at Single-A Lynchburg, Va., and Ezell was back at Turner Field on Friday night, watching the Braves play the Cardinals, her fifth game back in the stands since being hit Sept. 14.

Ezell's season tickets are behind home plate now. The Braves moved her down from where she used to sit along the third-base line about 12 rows up. She's in the second section up now, behind a 33-foot screen. Still, she wears a protective softball batter's mask to games. Foul balls still come over the net.

"It's like being hit by lightning twice. The chances are infinitesimally small," Ezell said. "But I still panic every time a ball is in the air anywhere behind [home] plate."

A week earlier, when a foul ball landed about 10 feet from her, she crouched into a fetal position.

"Never even occurred to me not to feel safe," Ezell said. "Now I'm nervous at a game. ... That's not an irrational fear. It's a rational one."

A matter of inches is all that left both Ezell and Salazar living examples of the dangers of foul balls.

"Every doctor that I spoke with said it was a miracle that it didn't kill me," she said.

The fact that both incidents came within the past six months is a good indication these are not a once-in-a-blue-moon occurrences. And it doesn't just happen to the unsuspecting, distracted fan. Salazar played 13 seasons in the major leagues. He was watching the game from the top rail of the dugout.

Ezell had headphones on, listening to the Braves' radio broadcast, when she was hit. She was paying attention, she said, and saw the ball coming at her. She still didn't have time to react.

"When the ball goes up and there are lights, you really can't follow it exactly," she said. "It was just this bright light and I saw the ball and by the time I saw that it was coming right at me, it was way too late to do anything. ... I was absolutely just frozen."

Foul balls don't discriminate. Even the most experienced parents can look on helplessly as their child is hit.

Atlanta sports agent Molly Fletcher's 6-year-old daughter, Meg, sustained a fractured skull after being hit by a foul ball last August while sitting four rows behind the visiting dugout. She underwent emergency brain surgery and ultimately recovered, but only after a tremendous scare.

Braves players don't want their own children sitting anywhere close to vulnerable areas. Third baseman Chipper

Jones said his four sons either sit in his luxury suite or occasionally in the SunTrust seats directly behind home plate, protected by the screen.

"You throw 90 to 100 mph and you have a guy up there swinging 90 or 100 mph and it's just a recipe for disaster," Jones said. "What if that ball that hit Salazar hit a 5-year-old little girl in the front row over the top of the dugout? It would have killed her."

If it were up to players like Jones, the Turner Field netting would extend from dugout to dugout. Right now the 33-foot high screen extends only 56 feet along the area behind home plate. At the very least, Jones would like to see the shorter netting on each side of the main screen behind home plate heightened.

The Braves added another 38 feet of netting on each side of the main screen when they put in 150 premium seats closer to home plate three years ago, but it's only 5 feet high. Jones said foul balls clear that shorter screen frequently and regularly hit fans as low as the ninth or 10th row.

"Now you give the fan down the lines time to react to line drives," Jones said. "Check-swing foul balls that miss the big screen and go over the little screen, the fan in the 10th row has got no shot."

McCann wants improvements, too. He knows how close he came to having his life changed forever that day in March when Braves players, coaches and staff feared at first that Salazar might die.

"You wouldn't be the same person if something ever happened," said McCann, who left that game and rushed to the hospital to be by Salazar's side. "... There needs to be changes. They need netting up that goes further around."

Baseball officials have long heard the debate over whether they should extend safety nets; they haven't for fear of losing fans who complain about obstructed views. But the issue has become more pronounced as stadium seating is built closer to home plate and foul territory shrinks.

Braves general manager Frank Wren said the team evaluates its safety netting regularly. But the club is hesitant to change from what he calls "pretty much the norm for baseball" for fear of upsetting fans.

"Even as the nets have become thinner and allow better visibility, fans still prefer to not look through a screen," Wren said. "That's one of the challenges clubs face."

It might come as a surprise that Ezell doesn't want changes.

"It's nonsense," Ezell said when asked about extending netting. "It changes the game. No, I'm not in favor of it. There is no way to make it impossible for a ball to hit the stands. Well, you can close everything in Plexiglas or something. It's just something that happens."

Ezell is still being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. She had to have her nose surgically reconstructed and had three surgeries on her right eye to reattach her retina.

She wears an eye patch now and has permanently lost much of her depth perception for anything closer than 6 feet.

"You don't ever want me to pour a cup of coffee for you," said Ezell, 73, a retired station manager for Atlanta's WABE. "I really have problems going down steps."

But she still regularly takes the steps at Turner Field, just more slowly now. Her husband, Hank Ezell, alerts her if a foul ball is coming near.

She has a signed baseball from McCann and said the Braves have been attentive throughout her ordeal.

"For 69 years I've been a baseball fan," said Ezell, who grew up attending Cardinals games in St. Louis. "I just love it. It's very much a part of my life. Just a little plop in the eye is not going to stop it. ...

"You pick yourself up and you move on and you do what you want to do. Life is good. It's a little cockeyed, but it's good."

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