

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

How can you split Ford Frick vote between Hughes, Hawk?

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Of course I'm going to tilt Pat Hughes' way on almost everything.

I've known the golden-voiced Cubs radio announcer since he arrived here 20 years ago. We were born on the exact same day – Friday, May 27, 1955 (the Cubs lost to the Milwaukee Braves 7-5 at Wrigley Field. I've joked that we were identical twins separated at birth. Pat got the good voice and I was left with the just plain loud voice.

So now I'm conflicted. For the first time in history, two sitting Chicago announcers are competing at the same time for the Hall of Fame's Ford C. Frick Award, presented for excellence in baseball broadcasting. Right on the heels of calling his first World Series victory, Hughes is one of eight candidates for the award announced Dec. 5 at the winter meetings. His most senior competition is Hawk Harrelson.

Hughes and Harrelson are equally deserving of a spot in Cooperstown. Who do you choose?

On one hand, Hawk is 15 years older than Hughes and began his broadcasting career in 1975 with the Red Sox. He's had two tours of duty with the Sox – 1982 to 1985 and 1990 to the present. On the basis of longevity and distinctiveness with his many catch phrases, Hawk should have an edge.

Hughes is simply smooth as silk where Hawk is rough-edged. He has a wry, sly and dry sense of humor, best played off his late partner Ron Santo. Hughes worked for the Twins and Brewers for the better part of 15 years before replacing Thom Brennaman in the radio booth in 1996. He is the first Cubs radio announcer to not have to do regular work on the TV side since Jack Quinlan.



Pat Hughes (left) is the golden-voiced Chicago Ford C. Frick candidate, while fellow nominee Hawk Harrelson is a throwback with his catch phrases and “YE-S-S-S!” home-run call.

Can we split the vote and give each a half a Frick? The Hall of Fame is alternating time periods of Frick award nominees, so contemporary broadcasters who don't make the cut won't have another chance until the rotation comes up again in a few years.

The Chicago connection expands even further beyond our two favorites. Dewayne Staats is up for the award. Staats, now settled into a long tenure as Tampa Bay Rays voice, was the primary Cubs radio man from 1985, succeeding Milo Hamilton, until 1989, when he moved on to the Yankees with 25-year-old Brennaman taking over with new color partner Santo.

And Mike Krukow is in the mix, too. A longtime Giants broadcast-booth fixture, the erstwhile Polish Prince had distinguishing moments as a Cubs starter from 1977 to 1981 before enjoying his best years at Candlestick Park.

The rest of the Frick field includes Jacques Doucet, the Montreal Expos' French-language voice from 1972 to 2004; Mets announcer Gary Cohen, and two deceased voices, the Athletics' Bill King and the Red Sox's Ned Martin.

Hughes won't comment on his candidacy. He does not want to disturb the "karma" involved. Over the decades, even doing radio with its requirement of extra verbiage, he has learned when not to talk.

It would be against Hawk's human nature NOT to comment.

"It is extremely humbling to even be considered within the company of the top broadcasters in our game, let alone a finalist for the prestigious Ford C. Frick Award," said Harrelson. "Nothing gives me more enjoyment than sharing the game of baseball with White Sox fans each season. Baseball is the greatest game there is, and it would certainly be the ultimate honor to be recognized among some of the great voices of the game in Cooperstown."

Unlike the players' Hall of Fame vote for so many decades, in which inactive or retired baseball writers were casting ballots, the Frick vote is conducted among the most qualified people.

All 13 living Frick winners vote: Vin Scully, Marty Brennaman, Bob Uecker, Denny Matthews, Jon Miller, Dick Enberg, Jaime Jarrin, Tony Kubek, Tim McCarver, Eric Nadel, Felo Ramirez, Dave Van Horne and Bob Wolff.

Baseball historian/political speechwriter Curt Smith also has a vote. Smith wrote the seminal biography of baseball announcers, "Voices of the Game," three decades ago. Rounding out the voters are historians David J. Halberstam and Ted Patterson, and sports TV-radio columnist Barry Horn of the Dallas Morning News.

No Frick voting process can go by without a pitch for the great Vince Lloyd. Vinnie's turn is not up this year. He died in 2003. The longer the voting process continues into the future with gaps in between, the harder it will be for Lloyd to get serious consideration. But his name must be kept alive.

The past Frick Award winners with Chicago connections and their award dates were Bob Elson (1979), Jack Brickhouse (1983), Harry Caray (1989), Hamilton (1992) and

Gene Elston (2006). Elston was best-known as the Astros' longest-running announcer, but also served as a Cubs voice alongside first Bert Wilson, then Hamilton and Quinlan on WIND-Radio in the mid-1950s.

The dream here is Hughes, Harrelson and Lloyd all join that list in our lifetimes.