



## ***Thomas can't be faulted for teary speech***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
Posted Monday, July 28th, 2014*

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — Frank Thomas used to blow out teams with his unparalleled combination of power and patience.

Now that he's 46 and retired, he blew out the Hall of Fame with perhaps the most teary induction speech in memory that wrecked the ceremony planner's best-laid plans.

One estimate had Thomas talking for nearly 18 minutes between snuffles and

a rapid-fire listing of some 139 teammates in the home stretch. The Hall of Fame prefers inductees keep their speeches under 10 minutes. But Thomas is a big man who never did anything small. He was a train roaring downhill with the brakes failing.

Good for him. We try to shoehorn everything into neat sound bites in an attention-shortened age. In this case, what's the rush? The ceremonies were televised on a lazy Sunday afternoon and didn't lapse over into some network's prime-time programming – no "Heidi" syndrome here. Broadcast news programs and print deadlines were many hours away. Some 50,000 attendees in a rock concert/country fair type setting weren't in a hurry to go anywhere on a sun-splashed afternoon.

They got their money's worth with six inductees, the biggest single living Hall of Fame class since 1971, and the largest Chicago-centric class in memory – Frank Thomas, Tony La Russa and Greg Maddux.

Unlike La Russa, who strangely omitted credit to mentors like Jerry Reinsdorf, Walter Haas, Roland Hemond, Bill Veeck, and Loren Babe when he winged his speech, the Big Hurt didn't want to leave anyone out. Well, he did. Speaking almost faster than humanly



**Frank Thomas (from left), Joe Torre and Tony La Russa analyze their induction speeches at the Hall of Fame.**

possible, Thomas crammed in some 139 Sox, Athletics and Blue Jays teammates, but had to cut out 50 more.

He even mentioned his equipment managers starting with the late “Chicken Willie” Thompson in the Sox clubhouse.

And he did not forget former Sox GM Kenny Williams, who let him walk as a free agent after the 2005 season despite Reinsdorf’s career-long support to Thomas. However, Williams had to go last in a list his supervisory team executives with the statement of “...and Kenny Williams.”

“I’m an emotional guy because I wear my heart on my sleeve,” Thomas explained.

He sometimes got in trouble with his mouth back in the day. But he’s gotten religion in his public life and aims to please as a baseball TV analyst, commercial pitchman and sometime Sox assistant. In the recent Comcast SportsNet special, produced by Jerome Holtzman Award winners Ryan McGuffey (present at the ceremonies) and Sarah Lauch, the abiding theme in Thomas’ life was the guidance of father figures.

Thomas knew his task would be difficult. As he started, he said, “Give me a second. Whew...whew.”

Seconds later, once he mentioned Frank Thomas, Sr.—“I took that to heart, Pops, look at us today” -- the tears began to flow and never really stopped. The elder Thomas died in 2001, during the season that Thomas suffered a season-ending left triceps tear, leading teammate David Wells to question the veracity of Frank’s injury. Wells was noticeably not on the long list of teammates that he thanked.

“It’s rough,” Thomas said. “Some of the closest people in my life are gone. When you get to that, it’s a lot of emotion. My father meant so much to me. He’s not here today. I’m proud of that. Probably won’t get over this ‘till the day is over. I wanted to thank everyone who touched me.

“I was very coachable from Day One. Great coaches got me to where I’m at right now.”

Thomas was equally emotional about Walt Hriniak, who is still very much alive. Thomas previously said he wasn’t the same hitter, despite still-prodigious stats, once Hriniak got his walking papers from the Sox in 1995.

The tears welled again mentioning Robert Fraley, his late agent.



**Prior to his speech, Greg Maddux talks about the course of his career that led him to Cooperstown.**

## Himes, Goldis get credit

But he got ahold of himself long enough to properly credit Reinsdorf, Eddie Einhorn and the tag-team of GM Larry Himes and scouting chief Al Goldis, who drafted him No. 1 in 1989. Reinsdorf, of course, immediately effected a reconciliation with the Sox once Thomas retired after the 2008 season. Any worker would love to have such patronage from the big boss.

So why mention so many teammates? Thomas said they were his friends. Again, the Big Hurt tends to inflate things, such as the number of homers he possibly lost (he estimates around 50) playing in a more pitcher-friendly U.S. Cellular Field in the 1990s. Yet more than a few former teammates were pleased they piggybacked onto Thomas' moment in the sun, especially those with distinctive nicknames like Lane "One Dog" Johnson.

La Russa's talk seemed to focus more on team goals and philosophies. He realized the significance of the "Winning Ugly" 1983 Sox. "The first time since 1959 a baseball team in Chicago had won," he reminded those in the crowd who have forgotten history.

La Russa mentioned Paul Richards, the elderly Sox manager of 1976-turned-Bill Veeck-advisor, who may have questioned his first managerial moves. Later, he conjured up the presence of legendary Cardinals coach and instructor George Kissell, who advised him if he wanted to manage, he had to (1) love the game and (2) be willing to learn it. He reminded the audience of the brilliance of the late Charlie Lau, who taught the then-young manager the offensive part of baseball. And no La Russa talk could go without credit to side-kick/pitching coach Dave Duncan, who began his three-team run with La Russa in 1983 with the Sox.



**Tony La Russa was honored by several of the teams for which he managed in the Hall of Fame weekend.**

Still, strangely, no Reinsdorf, who kicks himself publicly for not blocking La Russa's firing by Hawk Harrelson in 1986. No mention of the Athletics ownership, who took Reinsdorf's recommendation to quickly hire La Russa after his Sox sacking. And not a peep about Walt Jocketty, a young comrade in the Sox organization in the late 1970s who was re-united with La Russa in both Oakland and St. Louis.

But even more noticeable was the lack of mention of Bill Veeck and Roland Hemond for promoting La Russa to the manager role at age 34 on August 2, 1979. Afterwards

during the post-induction press conference La Russa did say he regretted he did not acknowledge Hemond.

But each to his own. In a speech lasting exactly 10 minutes as instructed by the Hall, reminding observers of his razor-sharp control through the majority of his 355 victories, Maddux was cool and efficient, keeping in character. He has a tight-knit family, starting with father Dave, his first coach. Next up was brother/pitching coach/“Animal House” facilitator Mike.

### **Multi-talented Mike Maddux**

“I was very fortunate to have a brother that I could learn from,” said Mad Dog. “He even taught me a little bit about science. It has to do with a little methane and a lighter, and I still get a huge kick out of it today. (Laughter from the audience) That’s funny, huh. OK.” You can be 100 percent assured the new Hall of Famer is multi-talented beyond baseball.

Three names came out of Maddux’s past who are not well-known in helping him perfect his physical and mental well-being. One is coach Keith Kleven, who “taught me how to take care of my arms, legs and core. I didn’t know the impact Keith would have on my career until some 5,000 innings later with no arm problems. I thank him very much for keeping my body healthy through my entire career, and I consider him the best in his field.”

Indeed, Brewers pitching coach Rick Kranitz just last week told the Chicago Baseball Museum how he was amazed Maddux was so flexible when he coached him in his first pro season at Pikeville, Ky. in 1984. Kranitz, who also taught Maddux the changeup grip, was one of three Cubs minor-league coaches who got credit in the speech.

I had done about a 12,000-word chapter on Maddux in my 2003 book *Throwbacks*. But through all the voluminous work, through all the years of covering Maddux live, I had never heard of an association with famed sports psychologist (or in a more updated term, mental skills coach) Harvey Dorfman. Maddux keeps things close to his vest, such as calling pitches for Frank Castillo, Mike Morgan and other Cubs pitchers in 1992. His relationship with Dorfman, who died at 75 in 2011, obviously fell in this category.

“After many failures in baseball, I met Harvey Dorfman,” He taught me to focus on only the things I can control. Those lessons spilled over to my personal life, as well. I consider him to be one of the best coaches I’ve ever had.”

Some of the most delicious Maddux references were aimed at the Cubs’ tortured history. He told how he defected as a free agent to the Braves so he could start both a family and win a World Series. “Sorry, Chicago,” he said to more laughs.

And after he got his ring in Atlanta, he followed his sentimentality and the blandishments of Cubs GM Jim Hendry and top aide Gary Hughes to return to Chicago to round out a supposedly dream pitching staff headed by Kerry Wood and Mark Prior. Oops, in spite of his 16 victories in 2004, the hyped team collapsed in the final week and coughed up a 1½-game wild-card lead.

“I wouldn’t be a Cub if I couldn’t handle a little heartache,” he mused, telling the 48,000 estimated crowd that the Cubs fans were the greatest in the world, miffing the large Braves contingent present for Maddux’s induction.

For a low-key, soft-spoken guy, Maddux kept attracting references from the other inductees. His old manager, Bobby Cox, claimed Maddux was the only pitcher who made him nervous because of a pre-game checklist of things to which Cox had to pay attention during the game. Looking at Maddux, Joe Torre said, “Mark these words, Greg Maddux has no pulse.”

Sure he does. But magicians don’t reveal their tricks, even when they’re enshrined in Cooperstown. Coolly, like Maddux, or emotionally, like Thomas. With one bottom-line thought.

“I’m in the Hall of Fame, man,” said the Big Hurt.