



New Era Has Begun in HOF Process

By Paul Ladewski, Executive Director

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Now that the first great wave of Steroids Era candidates has become eligible for Hall of Fame induction, home runs, RBI and earned run averages aren't the only values open for interpretation.

The words "integrity," "sportsmanship" and "character" have taken on far greater importance than in past elections. They will remain that way for as long as athletes continue to breach the code of ethics in attempts to gain competitive edges.

According to the Baseball Writers' Association of America guidelines, there are five rules for Hall of Fame election. The final one states "Voting shall be based upon the players' record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played." The key words are "integrity, sportsmanship, character" and how they relate to the use of performance-enhancers if they relate at all.



Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa leads the new wave of Hall of Fame candidates.

This is a complicated issue with no perfect solution. Save for a few admitted cheaters, we'll never know with any great degree of certainty who played within the rules. That leaves BBWAA members to make decisions based on physical appearance, statistical trends and hearsay for the most part.

The way I see it, the challenge is to take the guesswork out of process in a way that upholds of the standards of the true Hall of Famers and sends a stern message to those who follow them. After months of thought and debate, my compromise solution is to ignore any player who spent the majority of his career in the height of the Steroids Era. That covers the 1993 to 2005 seasons, based on my research and conversations with major league sources.

While Jeff Bagwell, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Mark McGwire, Mike Piazza and Sammy Sosa have the numbers to be selected for the greatest individual honor in the game, none of them will receive my vote until further notice.

To be sure, not every player took performance-enhancers in that period. Yet as far as I can determine, former Most Valuable Players Ken Caminiti and Jose Canseco weren't far off when they estimated that 50-to-75 percent of all major leaguers used them at the time. They should know – both admittedly were among the guilty parties. That's too large a percentage for me to take lightly.

What about the other 25-to-50 percent? Only the most naïve player was unaware that something wasn't right at the time. To my knowledge, not one stepped forward to alert the proper authorities. In my mind, the non-users also were willing accomplices to the biggest scandal in baseball history.

Isn't that the kind of thing that got White Sox infielder Buck Weaver in trouble decades ago?

Weaver was among the eight players implicated in the fix of the 1919 World Series. The popular veteran was aware of the scheme, but an investigation acquitted him of any involvement on the field. Intent to clean up the game at all costs, new commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis barred him from Organized Ball two years later. Weaver never took part in another major league game.

Many considered the penalty to be excessive even in less permissive times, but perhaps that's what needs to be done now. This election is a great opportunity for the Hall of Fame voters to make a statement that, if an athlete is found to compromise the credibility of the game to this extent, then he should expect to pay a steep price for it.

Harsh penalties won't make the performance-enhancers go away any time soon. As long as the financial stakes remain so great, they're here to stay, I'm afraid. But if the Hall of Fame closes its doors to cheaters, it may convince the others to think long and hard before they bite the hand that feeds them.