

Santo, Minoso Face Tough Crowd in Latest Hall of Fame Bid

By Paul Ladewski

On Sunday, when the Golden Era committee convened at the winter meeting in Dallas to discuss the 10 candidates before the annual Hall of Fame election, only one thing appeared to be certain.

There will be far more disappointed candidates than ecstatic ones on Monday morning, when the results are scheduled to be announced.

“The field is a strong one this year – very strong,” said Chicago Tribune baseball writer Dave van Dyck, one of the 16 voters. “Each one has credentials that speak for themselves. The committee has a tough job ahead of it once again.”

In addition to Chicago hopefuls Minnie Minoso and Ron Santo, the list includes former players Ken Boyer, Gil Hodges, Jim Kaat, Tony Oliva, Allie Reynolds and Luis Tiant and executives Buzzie Bavasi and Charlie Finley.

Santo, Gil Hodges and Tony Oliva appear to be front-runners if only because they were closest to election while on the Baseball Writers Association of America ballot in the past. Hodges peaked at a 63.4 percent approval rate, while Oliva (47.3) and Santo (43.1) were next in line.

No predictions were heard from the voters, however, as they were sworn to secrecy on the matter.

As Arizona Diamondbacks special assistant and former White Sox general manager Roland Hemond put it, “If we discuss the candidates or the process in public, we could make an enemy for life.”

“Someone I knew well asked me what I thought about it, and my answer was, ‘I don't know. I honestly don't know,’” van Dyck went on to tell the Chicago Baseball Museum. “Everyone has an opinion. It depends on who you ask.”

As a whole, the panel is considered to be as deep and well-rounded as it has been in years.

Moreover, in addition to Hemond and van Dyke, the committee has a third member with Chicago roots in Hall of Famer Billy Williams, the former Cubs outfielder.

Of the other 13 members, the vast majority have crossed paths with either Santo or Minoso or both in the past. A breakdown:

Hank Aaron: The Hall of Fame outfielder played against both players, but Santo in particular. The two spent 14 seasons in the National League together.

Paul Beaston: The Ontario native has no history with either player. The former MLB president serves in a similar capacity for the Toronto Blue Jays at present.

Bill DeWitt Jr.: The St. Louis Cardinals board chairman was a St. Louis Browns batboy while Minofo was early in his career. The franchise was owned by his father, a longtime major league executive.

Dick Kaegel: The veteran baseball writer covers the Kansas City Royals for MLB.com. He was with The Sporting News previously.

Pat Gillick: The retired executive served as general manager for four major leagues clubs after Santo and Minofo had played their final games. He will take the place of Hall of Fame pitcher Don Sutton, who cannot participate because of arm surgery.

Al Kaline: Like Minofo, he was one of the elite American League outfielders of his era. The Hall of Famer played with Minofo and opposite Santo in five All-Star Games.

Ralph Kiner: The Hall of Famer began his broadcast career with the White Sox in 1961, the last for Minofo as a regular. They also were paired against one another in two All-Star Games. In the New York Mets broadcast booth, he was no stranger to Santo as well.

Tommy Lasorda: Minofo reached base four times against the pitcher in his only American League season. He was Los Angeles Dodgers third base coach in 1973, the last for Santo in the National League.

Juan Marichal: Santo was one of his toughest outs – the third baseman hit .296 and seven home runs in 115 at-bats against him. The Dominican native doesn't have to be told of Minofo's role in the advancement of Latin players.

Gene Michael: He played briefly against Santo before he became Cubs manager.

Jack O'Connell: As the longtime BWAA president, he has heard the arguments for both sides often.

Brooks Robinson: The Hall of Famer saw Minofo up close in several of his prime years. He also is very familiar with Santo, as they were widely considered to be the best players at their position in the 1960s decade.

Al Rosen: While the third baseman and Minofo were Indians teammates only briefly, they were members of the American League All-Star squad three times.

Twelve votes are required for induction. Committee members can vote for zero-to-four candidates.

"I'm not sure that I know who I will vote for yet," van Dyke said only hours before the election. "We've got a lot to talk about."