

When the best players in the game — like Dick Allen — are not elected, the Hall of Fame's credibility comes into question.

By William C. Kashatus

The National Baseball Hall of Fame will announce the results of the Baseball Writers' Association's election of its newest members on Jan. 25. Let's hope the writers do a better job than the Golden Days Era Committee — which considers players from the 1950s and 1960s — did last month when it snubbed Dick Allen by one vote for the second time in seven years. The outcome was so outrageous that it left long-time fans distraught and had Allen's family questioning whether "foul play" was involved.

Whether or not a conspiracy exists to keep Allen out does not eliminate two hard facts: that his career totals warrant induction into the Hall, and that the voting process must be reformed to ensure the integrity of future elections.

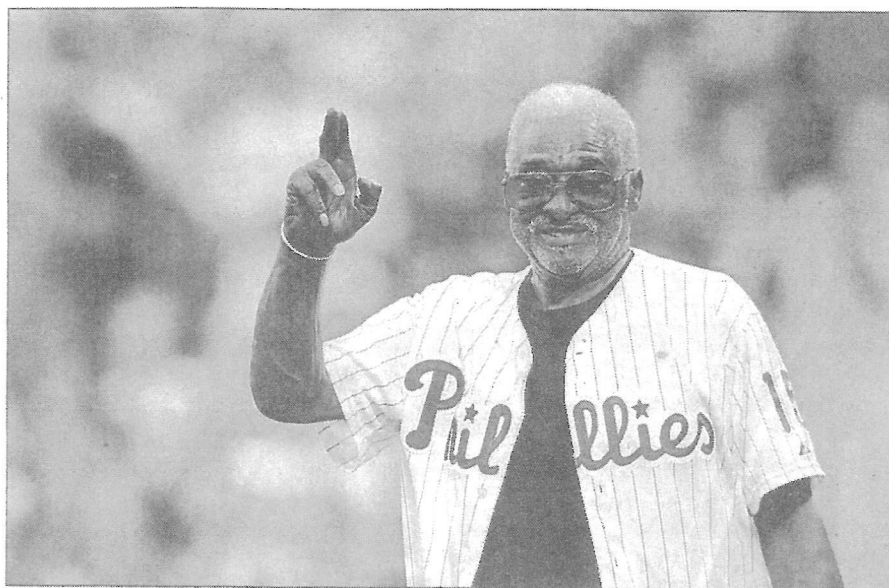
Between 1964 and 1977, Allen posted a .292 batting average, .534 slugging average, 351 home runs, and 1,119 RBIs, won a Rookie of the Year Award with the Phillies, a Most Valuable Player Award, two home run titles, and an RBI title with the Chicago White Sox, and appeared in seven All-Star games. Baseball's new, advanced metrics confirm that Allen is one of the greatest players in the history of the game.

In fact, none of the three field players who were elected by the Golden Days Era Committee — Gil Hodges, Minnie Minoso, and Tony Oliva — come close to Allen's numbers.

The inconsistency raises the question: What were the five voters who failed to cast a ballot for Allen thinking? Their ignorance not only diminishes the value of Hall of Fame membership for the candidates who were elected from that era but for all Hall of Famers. Simply put: When the best players in the game — like Allen — are not elected, the credibility of the entire institution comes into question.

If the Hall wants to be taken seriously, the committee's voting process must be restructured in the following ways to allow for greater accountability.

First, abolish the 12-member Historical Overview Committee, which is appointed by the Baseball Writers' Association and selects candidates and voters for each of the era committees. Replace it with a three-member panel consisting of a historian who has published several respected books on the era being considered; a statistician who is familiar with both the traditional and the new metrics; and an independent arbitrator, who would protect the candi-



Former Phillies slugger Dick Allen waves to the crowd before a baseball game against the New York Mets in 2017. AP, File

dates and voters from interference by a third party. This arrangement would reduce bias and obstructionism by limiting the number of individuals involved in the selection process.

Second, if a candidate's career spans two different eras and his productivity is evenly divided, he should be considered by the committees of both eras. Allen was considered by the "Golden Era" committee in 2014, prior to the Hall's decision to divide that era into two separate committees: "Golden Days" (1950-1969) and "Modern Baseball" (1970-1987). Despite the fact that Allen's career — and productivity — spanned both eras, the Hall's board refused to consider his candidacy in 2017 when the Modern Baseball Committee convened.

Three years later, in 2020, when the Golden Days Era Committee was scheduled to meet, Allen, who was dying of cancer, was forced to wait yet another year due to the coronavirus pandemic and the inability of the voters to meet in person. Allen died on Dec. 7, 2020, the day after the results of the election would have been announced. The Hall's refusal to hold a virtual election was especially heartless, considering that Allen was dying and missed induction by a single vote in 2014.

Third, the Hall should either drop the controversial "character clause," or specify those cases where it must apply (i.e., betting on the game, pedophilia, overtly racist behavior, steroid use). Remove offending candidates from consid-

eration before the ballots are distributed to the voters.

The character clause was used as a convenient excuse to prevent Allen's election by the Baseball Writers' Association between 1983 and 1997, and more recently by the era committees. In fact, his only "sin" was rebelling against the racism and discriminatory practices of the game's white establishment. Allen demonstrated the same character as Jackie Robinson, but he was punished rather than honored for his moral courage. Until the character clause is removed or more clearly defined, it will continue to be manipulated by voters to fulfill their own agendas.

Finally, make public the ballots of all the voters. This would make them accountable to the fans and prevent a proxy from going rogue by voting his own agenda instead of the wishes of the voter he is supposed to represent — something that prevented Allen from gaining election in 2014.

Until these reforms are enacted, the era committees will be little more than elitist boys' clubs, their elections popularity contests, and the Hall's mission to "honor, by enshrinement, those individuals who had exceptional careers" unfulfilled.

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