

# Don't reward tainted stars

By William C. Kashatus

**B**aseball writers have until the end of this month to cast their ballot for the Hall of Fame's Class of 2013. Of the 24 retired players to appear on the ballot for the first time are sluggers Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa and pitching ace Roger Clemens. While their statistical achievements are impressive, each man's career has been tainted by allegations of performance-enhancing substances.

If those who cast the ballots for baseball immortality take seriously their responsibility as stewards of the game, Bonds, Sosa, and Clemens will be rejected. It's a matter of preserving the integrity of the national pastime and its responsibility to young fans.

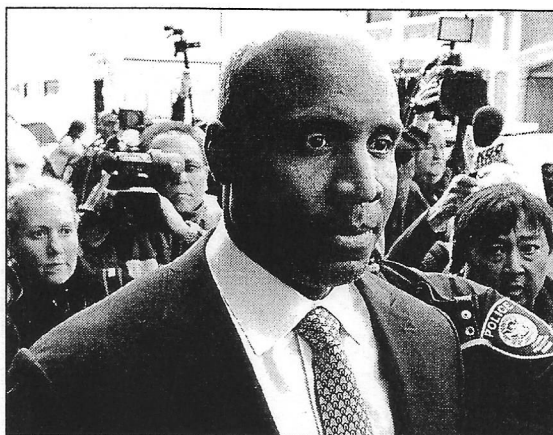
Without that blot on their records, the election of Bonds, Sosa and Clemens would make 2013 a banner year for the Hall of Fame. Few, if any, stars shined as brightly as they did during the last two decades.

Bonds, who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates and San Francisco Giants, enjoys the honor of being baseball's all-time home run king, with 762. He also holds the single-season mark, set in 2001, with 73.

Sosa, who had his most productive seasons with the Chicago Cubs, hit 609 home runs, a record among foreign-born players. He is also one of four National Leaguers in the history of the game to knock in at least 160 runs in a single season, which he did in 2001.

Clemens is one of the greatest pitchers of all time. During a 24-year career with the Boston Red Sox, Toronto Blue Jays, Houston Astros, and New York Yankees, he posted 354 victories, a 3.12 earned run average, and 4,672 strikeouts en route to a record seven Cy Young Awards.

But such stellar feats should not guarantee entry into Cooperstown when the records may very well have been



**Barry Bonds** leaving federal court last year.

Associated Press

achieved by the use of performance-enhancing substances.

In 2007, Bonds was indicted on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice for allegedly lying to a grand jury during the federal government's investigation of a business accused of supplying steroids to players. Bonds testified that he never knowingly took illegal steroids. He was convicted in April 2011 on the obstruction charge.

Sosa was suspected of abusing steroids in the mid-1990s, when he dramatically increased his body mass in a relatively short period. It wasn't until 2003, however, that he tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs, according to a 2009 New York Times report.

The Mitchell investigation found that Clemens used anabolic steroids. In August 2010, a federal grand jury indicted him on six felony counts involving perjury, false statements, and obstruction of Congress. Although Clemens pleaded not guilty, the proceedings were complicated by prosecutorial misconduct, which resulted in a mistrial. In a second trial this year, Clemens was found not guilty on all six counts of lying to Congress when he testified that he never took performance-enhancing drugs.

Voting baseball writers are instructed to judge each Hall of Fame candidate on ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contribution to their teams and baseball in general.

The spirit of this instruction is to ensure that those elected go beyond great feats to exemplify the fair play, perseverance, and teamwork that have made baseball the national pastime.

Bonds, Sosa and Clemens fail to meet these criteria. Kids took their cues from these players — kids like Taylor Hooton and Rob Garibaldi, whose tragic stories were revealed during the 2005 congressional hearings on steroid use in Major League Baseball.

Hooton, a 17-year-old pitcher for Plano (Texas) High School, used steroids to improve his performance, became depressed, and hanged himself. Garibaldi, a rightfielder at the University of Southern California, had been told for years that he had all the ingredients of a major leaguer except size, so he started using steroids to gain bulk. In addition to adding body mass, Garibaldi suffered from depression, uncontrollable rage, and suicidal thinking. He shot himself in 2002 at the age of 24.

Who knows how many other teens did or are doing steroids because of the example set by Bonds, Sosa, and Clemens? It would be a tremendous disservice to the game, and to the youngsters who love it, to reward these egotistical stars with bronze plaques in Cooperstown.

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