

# Rose, Shoeless Joe deserve second chances

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

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When Major League Baseball released a ballot for fans to name the top players of the century at last month's All Star game, it fueled the ongoing controversy over the sport's two most prominent outcasts — Pete Rose and Shoeless Joe Jackson.

Compiled by a panel of sportswriters, baseball executives and historians, the ballot includes both players among the greatest outfielders of the game. Eligibility for such a legendary list contradicts the fact that both men have been exiled for betting on baseball. Yet, Commissioner Bud Selig insists that it has "nothing to do with the selection of the team," nor does it "alter the circumstances both of them are under right now."

In fact, their eligibility for the All-Century Team indicates that the stewards of the national pastime do not agree with Selig, especially given the questionable circumstances that have always surrounded the bans of both players from the Hall of Fame.

For many, Pete Rose defined the game of baseball with his headfirst slides, blistering line drives and a competitiveness that burned white-hot for 23 years of a remarkable playing career with

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the Cincinnati Reds, Philadelphia Phillies and Montreal Expos. Yet he was banned from the game on the basis of rumor, hearsay and slander.

According to Bill James, author of "Politics of Glory: How Baseball's Hall of Fame Really Works," if Rose ever sues baseball seeking to nullify the agreement he made with the late Commissioner Bart Giamatti, he will win for two reasons:

■ Giamatti did not negotiate in good faith with Rose. He agreed that there would be no finding that the former Phillie bet on the game if he accepted a lifetime ban. But Giamatti almost immediately announced his belief that Rose did, indeed, bet on the game, thereby nullifying the agreement.

■ Major League Baseball, by taking its case to the media, which subsequently slandered Rose; denied him the opportunity to make a living in his chosen profession.

These two facts are much more indisputable than the allegations that Rose bet on baseball. The circumstances surrounding Jackson's ban are even more questionable.

Joseph Jefferson Jackson, the

greatest natural hitter of all time, was accused of throwing the 1919 World Series along with seven of his teammates from the Chicago White Sox.

Despite the fact that the eight players were found innocent in a court of law, then-commissioner Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis banned them all from the game for life. "Regardless of the verdict of juries," he insisted in a blanket statement which made no distinction between the different levels of guilt among the players involved, "no player who entertains proposals to throw a game, no player who sits in conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where the ways and means of throwing games are discussed and does not promptly tell the club about it will ever play professional baseball."

Nearly a century later, it is difficult to accept Landis' ruling of Jackson's guilt because of three points that were established at Jackson's grand jury testimony in September 1920:

■ Jackson fielded flawlessly, collected the most hits (12), the highest batting average (.376) and the only home run in the 1919 World Series.

■ No one ever placed Jackson at any of the gamblers' meetings.

■ Jackson's \$5,000 share of

the take was left in his room. When he tried to return the money to those teammates who he knew to be involved in the fix, he was rebuffed.

Recently, both players have won the support of politicians and Hall of Famers alike. Among the advocates for reinstatement are former President Carter and Mike Schmidt for Rose and U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond and Hall-of-Famers Ted Williams and Bob Feller for Jackson. But Selig continues to stand firm.

If the fans do vote Rose and Jackson to the All-Century Team, it would be a strong message to the commissioner's office. After all, baseball is supposed to be the fans' game and the fans seem to want a second chance for Rose and Jackson.

That just might be the saving grace for those of us who truly love the game of baseball and its very human heroes. Perhaps in time, Bud Selig will feel the same way.

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