

Est. 75,000 Fans See the Last of a Passing Era Enter HOF

Written by Maury Brown
Monday, 30 July 2007 05:50



Yesterday, an [estimated record crowd of 75,000](#) saw **Cal Ripken, Jr. and Tony Gwynn** inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

The attendance figure is a staggering 60,000 more than the normal attendance for a Hall of Fame induction.

The up-tick in the pilgrimage to Cooperstown this year was a result of many things... fans being bused in from the Baltimore area to see Ripken, being one. But, maybe the biggest factor was that Ripken and Gwynn might be the last players to go into the Hall without the cloud of steroids hanging over their head.

There had been much talk of **Mark McGwire** and his possible first ballot selection (based on Win Shares: Cal Ripken, Jr., 427, Tony Gwynn, 398 and Mark McGwire, 342). But, after his testimony before Congress in November of 2005, in which he answered tearfully that he was “here to talk about the future, not the past,” McGwire – rightly or wrongly – became the first casualty of the steroid era and the Hall.

Indeed, there seemed to be little in the way of conversation from the podium or amongst the dignitaries about the specter of steroids yesterday. Here, with Barry Bonds all of one home run away from tying Henry Aaron, his name was never uttered in the ceremonies.

Only [Cal Ripken made one passing nod toward the subject](#) .

“It’s a great celebration for baseball, a way to step back from the controversy,” Ripken said. “Maybe we’ll be back to reality tomorrow.”

And so, “reality” has returned.

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With **Barry Bonds** not reaching the tying home run in San Francisco, baseball is set for an even worse PR nightmare, if that's possible. Bonds will likely hit 755 and possibly 756 during the upcoming 6 game road trip, which starts tomorrow in LA with the Dodgers. Bonds hitting the home runs in Dodger Stadium would most assuredly bring a chorus of boos given how Dodger catcher Russell Martin was received at the All-Star game at AT&T Park. A less acrimonious greeting might await Bonds at Petco Park when the Giants play the Padres in a three game set starting on Friday. But even then, it's a "lesser of two evils" scenario. Bonds tying and breaking the record would best be served in the safe(r) confines of AT&T Park.

So, the Class of 2007 has been inducted, and with that, a passing of era. From here on out, there will be elevated levels of discussion around who was, or was not, using PEDs. MLB has put themselves in this position. Whether Commissioner Selig wishes to say that negotiating a drug testing policy with the MLBPA would have been fruitless, or the PA saying that they would never have implemented a testing policy without Congress standing over baseball with a stick is besides the point. This is the state we are in.

But, the fact remains, the fans seem more than happy with the game, atmosphere, and the trimmings. [Saturday was the highest attended game in MLB history](#) , and that came on the heels of the [second highest attended game in history the Saturday before](#)

. Such is the duality of the game today as we view it through its various prisms.

We will talk, and talk, and then talk some more about what is "real" and what is "chemically altered" in Major League Baseball for who knows how long. Players will come up positive for PEDs, and will continue to do so when the paydays that come with being a player in the big leagues are so incredibly high. "Risk" may seem like a triviality when a couple of years at the major league level can set one up for life.

So, here's a toast to Ripken and Gwynn, the last of a dying breed of player. The last two that will enter the HOF without us all asking how many votes are being subtracted due to questions about whether he did, or did not, Juice.

The age of innocence, in that regard, had now passed.

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