

## Bochy's Bias Exposes Systemic Flaw in MLB All-Star Selection Process

Written by Rob Smith  
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In little league, the coach's kid always bats cleanup and pitches, even if he's not good at either. In pop warner, he inevitably winds up playing quarterback. As unfair as everyone knows it is, nepotism has always been present in youth sports, a time-honored rite of passage that every youngster must confront at one time or another. As the level of competition progresses (middle school, travel ball, high school, college), favoritism is eradicated and replaced by a more ideal meritocracy. Recently, though, the practice of giving preferential treatment to those close to you has reared its' ugly head in an unusual place: the selection process for the MLB All-Star game.

While fans voting in starters leads to popular, past-their-prime players such as Derek Jeter being recognized as all-stars, MLB is wise to allow the consumers of its' product to have a say in what they're watching. The problem in the process arises when the managers of each league's defending champions are allowed to fill in a large number of the remaining roster spots seemingly arbitrarily. [The San Francisco Giants are sending their largest all-star contingent since 1966](#), due largely to the fact that their manager, Bruce Bochy, spent 3 of his 14 selections passing over more worthy candidates in favor of Giants players who have had solid, yet unspectacular seasons.

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Giants' third baseman Pablo Sandoval missed the entire month of May, and has played in slightly more than half of his team's games this year. Sure, he's hitting .302 with an .844 OPS, but those numbers mean less when he's not putting them up on a regular basis. Neil Walker, meanwhile, has played 2nd base for the Pittsburgh Pirates in all but two of their games this year. His 59 RBI are more than double the amount (29) totaled by Sandoval thus far, and his 47 runs scored are nearly twice as much as Sandoval's 26. Bochy claims that Sandoval "has the numbers. I know he's missed a lot of time, but he's got a 21-game hitting streak, and with our third-base situation...it makes all the sense."

Well, I suppose it WOULD make sense if Walker didn't have experience playing third base in the big leagues (which he does). Even though Sandoval is a full-time third baseman, whereas Walker has been used exclusively at second base this year, it's not as if Sandoval's glove evokes images of Brooks Robinson in the minds of baseball fans. If "he's not really a third baseman" is Bochy's excuse for snubbing Walker, I'd be interested to hear his reason for passing over Diamondbacks third baseman Ryan Roberts. Roberts plays multiple positions, but he's manned the hot corner in 59 of the 80 games he's played in. Over that time, the undersized utility player has put up an impressive .779 OPS, stolen 13 bases, scored 47 runs, and hit 11 homeruns. Roberts washed out in Toronto and Texas before finding a home in the Diamondbacks organization, which coincidentally is hosting tonight's All-Star Game. How great of a story would it have been to see a scrappy, hard-nosed player overcome his past failures to earn an All-Star berth playing in front of his own team's fans? We'll never know because Bochy ably took on the role of overbearing father and gave "his" guy, who has missed almost half the season, the nod over Roberts and Walker, two players responsible in a big way for their respective teams being in contention for a playoff spot at the All-Star break.

In Sandoval's defense, his selection is probably the least-egregious example of Bochy showing bias towards his own players. Giants co-aces Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain both received manager's selections over Atlanta Braves hurler Tommy Hanson, and the numbers unequivocally indicate that they shouldn't have. Lincecum and Cain have nearly identical numbers, both sporting a 3.06 ERA and Cain having a slight edge in WHIP (1.10 to Lincecum's 1.20). Meanwhile, Hanson sports a 2.44 ERA which is lower than that of Roy Halladay, who will be the starting pitcher for the NL in tonight's game, and good for 3rd lowest in the National League. His 1.02 WHIP is tied with Halladay for 2nd lowest in the NL, and his .190 batting average against is tops in the NL and 3rd lowest in MLB. Hanson has more wins (10) than both Cain (8) and Lincecum (7).

Bochy didn't hide the fact that he selected his guys because, well, they're his guys, even though their performance this season is inferior to Hanson's. When pressed about snubbing Hanson, Bochy said, ["I obviously wanted to get some of my guys \[Giants pitchers\] there. But I do feel bad, because he certainly deserves to be here ."](#)

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Bochy's faux sympathy for Hanson is not going to be worth anything when Hanson goes to arbitration or attempts to negotiate an extension with Atlanta. It's not like he can tell the arbiter, "Well, you see, everybody knows I deserved to be an all-star, it's just that the guy picking the team wanted his own players instead." The connotation that comes from having the words "all-star" in front of your name can be quite lucrative come contract time, especially for an up-and-coming ace like Hanson. Bochy has essentially reached into Hanson's wallet for the sole purpose of keeping his own players happy, and that fact should not go unnoticed.

Bochy should undoubtedly be admonished for snubbing Hanson, but the decision should have never belonged to him in the first place. In the modern environment of professional sports, where the designation of "all-star" can be worth hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars, players fighting for spots on the team should not have to worry about favoritism entering the equation. At the very least, MLB could implement a committee, made up of GMs or scouts from every team, who would be responsible for selecting all of the players not voted in by fans. There wouldn't be a ton of work involved. It's the job of team executives and scouts to know who the best players are, and I doubt that it would take them too long to determine that Hanson has unquestionably had a better season than both Cain and Lincecum. A contingency of GMs from teams without a dog in the fight would be far less likely to make the type of biased selections that Bochy was allowed to institute. Instead, the coach's kids get to pitch and play quarterback, while Hanson, Walker, and Roberts are left behind to watch the game in anonymity. Consider it the last vestige of favoritism in an industry that normally shuns such behavior.

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