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Hall of Fame Inductions: Cooperstown and Akron

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
August 19, 1992

Three weeks ago in the middle of the Olympics two sports conducted their Hall of Fame ceremonies. On Saturday August 1, the NFL held its ceremonies at Canton, Ohio, and on Sunday August 2, Major League Baseball held its ceremonies at Cooperstown.

The NFL inductees were John Riggins, Lem Barney, John Mackey, and Al Davis. Both Mackey and Davis were significant figures in the development of Professional Football in the United States both on and off the field, and both were controversial. It took John Mackey until his 15th year of eligibility to be chosen to the Hall, and Al Davis was a finalist seven times before his selection.

John Mackey played tight end for the Baltimore Colts from 1963 to '75. Number 82 redefined the position and therefore redefined offensive football. Mackey was the first tight end to be both a tremendous blocker and a deep pass threat. He had 4.7 speed, and devastating power as a blocker and a runner. He was voted by the writers as the best tight end of the first 50 years of the NFL and was in five pro-Bowls.

John Mackey also redefined the game off the field. He was the first president of the NFL Players Association, and organized the first strike during the 1970 pre-season. The owners never forgave him. In 1975 in the Mackey Case the Supreme Court held that the Rozelle Rule on free agency was an illegal conspiracy in restraint of trade. It gave the players a great victory, which they gave back in negotiations in 1977. But the man who gave this case its name, is now in the Hall of Fame.

Joining him there is Al Davis, the Brooklyn born head of the Oakland Raiders, who said he wanted to create an organization that would emulate the best of the old Yankee and Dodger organizations of the 30s and 40s. He was an AFL founder, a coach, an owner, the man who created and sustained one of the greatest franchises in the history of professional football--The Oakland, Los Angeles, Al Davis, Raiders. The Silver and Black, Commitment to Excellence, Just Win Baby, Intimidation Defense, the Bump and Run. A .670 winning percentage and three Super Bowls alone should have put Al Davis into Canton.

But it did not. He was also the rebel. The man who opposed the merger of the AFL and NFL. The man who moved his team from

Oakland to Los Angeles for pure greed, after the other owners had voted against the move. He took Pete Rozelle to court and won. Rozelle branded him "The Outlaw." This was the man that Pete Axthelm once described as sinister. Al called Pete and asked him not to call him "sinistah" because Al's mother read the New York papers and she did not like it when Al was called "sinistah." Besides said Davis, "I'm not sinistah." Many in the NFL thought he was.

My favorite Al Davis quote "Any dummy can make money operating a pro football club," said in reference to the 1977 TV contract which gave each team \$6M. How right he was.

On Sunday August 2, the Baseball people gathered at the National Baseball Hall Fame in Cooperstown, the place at which Abner Doubleday did not invent the game of baseball. That day Tom Seaver, Rollie Fingers, Hal Newhouser, and Umpire Bill McGowan joined the over two hundred other inductees. Pete Rose would have been there this year.

Rollie Fingers was another one of those players who redefined his sport. 341 Saves, 2.91 ERA, 1974 World Series MVP, 1981 Cy Young Award-MVP-Fireman of the Year. Rollie Fingers invented the concept of the closer, and the "Save" as a statistic was created because of him and his manager, Dick Williams, who understood how to use this talent.

The handlebar mustache, his trademark, came when Charlie O. Finley offered any player who grew facial hair, \$300. This major money in the early 70s could not be resisted. Fingers became one of the key figures on the World Championship A's of 1972, '73, '74, arguably one of the best teams of all time. He spent four years with the Padres and lead the NL in saves in the late Seventies. Then in the early '80s he went to the Brewers and led them to pennants in 1981 and '82.

George Thomas Seaver wore number 41 for the New York Mets and several other teams during his illustrious career. He had 311 wins, 3,650 K's, a 2.86 ERA, three Cy Young Awards, was Rookie of the Year in 1967, the only one to have 9 consecutive 200 strikeout seasons, pitched in a record 16 opening day games, won 23% of all of the Mets games while he was with them, and received the highest percentage of votes ever for a player entering the Hall of Fame.

Tom Terrific. The Golden Boy. Tom and Nancy, Baseball's perfect couple. He was many things. Certainly he was the Mets. Always

the team leader, and a key to the 1969 Miracle Mets who were all pitching. He also led them to a 1973 pennant. He was an incredibly good power pitcher, who was also a craftsman on the mound. His mechanics were textbook. He was one of those few players who you would go out to see, regardless of who he played for, or the significance of the game. Seaver pitching was enough.

Seaver says that the best thing about playing baseball is the game itself, the pure joy of playing the game, the mental and physical processes involved. We all share his joy.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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