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## Super Bowl XXX - Baseball HOF Electees - Interleague Play Coming

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It is that week between. The NFL divisional champions have been decided and the Super Bowl opponents are set. Now for the next ten days we will be bombarded with Super Bowl hype, as one of the great mid-winter rituals in American life takes place.

This is the triple-X rated Super Bowl, and we wait in great anticipation to see if once again it can disappoint on a grand and glorious scale. While we wait we can contemplate every bit of information known to man about past Super Bowls, we can drink in the rituals of this mid-winter pageant of conspicuous consumption, or we can simply ignore it and turn to other issues.

In fact there any number of interesting baseball stories developing on the horizon. For the first time in twenty-five years the Hall of Fame voters from the Baseball Writers Association of America, some living and some apparently dead but not yet declared so, have failed to elect anyone to the Hall of Fame. This remarkable development, which has happened only six times previously, came for reasons known only to those unknown writers who vote in this bizarre election. It was certainly not because there was a lack of worthy candidates.

At least three, and maybe more, were available to those who voted on this year's ballot. First, there was Tony Perez of Big Red Machine fame. Perez with an excellent glove at first, brought a powerful bat to the plate. Of all those who have ever played the game only 15 have higher RBI totals than Perez and all are in the Hall. But then Perez never won a seasonal RBI title although he did drive in 100+ runs seven times.

But even stronger are the cases for two pitchers who have won 300 or more games. This is the standard that is supposed to be the benchmark for excellence, the figure at which entrance to the Hall of Fame is automatic. No more.

Phil Neikro, who spend most of his career with losing teams in Atlanta is a wonderful case in point. He was able to win 318 games, and win 20 on three occasions, two of which were on less than brilliant Braves teams. His total was so high, say his critics, because he played so long. Precisely the point. He was better over a longer period than most pitchers, and in a season in which being able to play for a long time was highly honored when done by a shortstop, why is Neikro being punished for quality plus longevity?

The second pitcher who meets the automatic standard is Don Sutton with 324 wins. Again the rap is that he played so long, and that he played on teams that won a lot. Unfortunately too much of that time he was overshadowed by bigger names. But consider that his career ERA was nearly the same as Steve Carleton, that he averaged 34 starts a season for the first 22 years of his career, and that he won in double figures 21 times in his career. This one was a no brainer, an automatic trip to the Hall. Again the writers said no. It is the fourth rejection for Neikro and the third of Sutton.

Two other pitchers on the ballot are also likely candidates if not automatic entries. Jim Kaat with 283 wins, three 20 game win seasons, and 16 gold gloves, certainly is worthy of serious consideration. He was on six divisional or pennant winners, and was the anchor of the Twins staff. Tommy John is a similar case with 288 wins, great longevity, a member of five pennant and divisional winners, and a career that was nearly ended early by an arm injury. Both these pitchers deserve serious consideration, and a good case for their inclusion in the Hall of Fame can be made.

The failure to elect anyone is an interesting development because it means that if there is to be a player present in Cooperstown on August 4 for the induction ceremonies it will have to be someone chosen by the Veterans Committee. The problem is that the leading candidates are dead. And so if there is to be a live warm body on the podium it will have to be Jim Bunning whose 224 wins are considerably less than any of four rejected by the voters this year.

Then there is the case of Tony Oliva whose numbers are excellent, who is perhaps the best pure hitter of the postwar era, and who this year was rejected for the 15th and final time by the writers. Unfortunately his career was cut short and he doesn't have the career numbers, but then neither did Dizzy Dean or Sandy Koufax. Some players are so good that their shortened career should not be a barrier and Tony Oliva is one of those.

Finally at the baseball winter meetings it is now clear that inter-league play will begin in 1997. This is a mistake for several reasons and should never even be considered until the DH issue is resolved. But in the cynical pursuit of dollars the owners and players will forget tradition and tarnish the World Series a bit more. By the way, how are those collective bargaining negotiations coming along?

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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