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Baseball Hall of Fame Vote

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - BASEBALL HALL OF FAME VOTE
DECEMBER 11, 2019

It was a little over a week ago that I read a small notice about the Baseball Hall of Fame voting for the class of 2020. Those on the ballot were listed, and as always the name of Marvin Miller was on that list. I skimmed over that name muttering to myself something like, "yea, sure, fat chance." And that would be the end of it for another year. If there was one sure thing, betting that Marvin Miller would be rejected by Hall of Fame voters for the eighth time, was it.

Then a few days later, on Sunday, December 8, came the announcement of Marvin Miller's election to the Baseball Hall of Fame. He received twelve votes from the sixteen member Modern Era Committee, the exact number needed to achieve the seventy-five percent of the vote needed for election to the Hall. Two years earlier Miller received seven votes from this committee.

So what had changed? There were seven members of the sixteen member Modern Era Committee from the previous committee. The basic composition of the committee was similar to the previous one, although there were no managers on this committee. The mix was a bit different with baseball executives consisting of six general managers and no team presidents or chairmen of the board as there were on the 2017 committee. There was only one ex-owner on the committee. It seems unlikely, at least to me, that this change could have accounted for Miller's votes going from seven to twelve. On the rare occasion what can't possibly happen, happens

Perhaps the change was a result of the passage of time and the diminishing hostility to the ghost of Marvin Miller. Or maybe the Hall of Fame voters had been shamed by the cumulative criticism that the previous seven rejections had amassed. Perhaps it is simpler than all of that and the members of this committee looked at the record and voted for the self-evident.

The case for Marvin Miller was simple. He was instrumental in creating a new climate between owners and players where power was no longer flowing from the top down. Players now decide where they would like to live and play, and they can be

relatively certain that they are taking away a fair share of the revenue generated in modern sport.

The multi-million dollar contracts are usually mentioned as proof of Miller's significance, but it is much more than that. The lucrative contracts of the ordinary player affect many more players' lives than the mega-contracts. Power is nearly as important, and for some maybe more important, and that power is derived from free agency (freedom of movement) as well as from the existence of arbitration and grievance procedures. All of these are part of the Miller legacy.

Also of note is the increased competitiveness in baseball with the lack of dynasties as one consequence of free agency, although many will point out that there are still franchises that remain perpetual cellar dwellers with little chance of moving out of the doldrums. Player movement has, for the most part, made it a bit easier to construct a competitive team than it was before free agency. This would seem to have made baseball more interesting and competitive on the field as well as off.

It is not a stretch to say that Marvin Miller, who retired from baseball thirty-seven years ago, is the most significant figure in the game since 1960. That he is now recognized by this institution in Cooperstown is a simple case of the present catching up to the past. In the history of baseball in the twentieth century, Miller's name belongs with those of Ruth, Robinson, and Rickey, forming a quartet that encapsulates the complexities of this marvelous game in the modern era.

Also on this past Sunday the same committee voted Ted Simmons into the Hall of Fame. His achievements as a major league catcher in St. Louis are many and can be found in the statistical records of baseball. Beyond that was his role in the Major League Players Association and the struggle for free-agency.

In 1972 Simmons rejected the Cardinals contract offer and became the first player in the 20th century to play without a contract. He was prepared to play the entire 1972 season without signing and then test the reserve clause in the standard player contract. He was put under pressure from ownership and the press but held his ground. Chuck Korr in *The End of Baseball as We Know It* wrote that Simmons might well have been McNally and

Messersmith three years before the two players initiated the arbitration case that resulted in the end of free agency.

Instead, just prior to the All-Star Game the Cardinals gave into Simmons' salary demands and offered him the rarity of a multi-year contract. Korr says this of Ted Simmons, "In the future, he remembered what the union had done for him and what he might be able to do for other players. He became one of its most actively involved members"

At the press conference following the announcement of his election to the Hall of Fame Simmons noted his debt to Marvin Miller and called it an honor to go into the Hall with him. "We all know what he meant to Major League players in general. But I remember Marvin as a profound influence on my life and how he affected my own life and the life of my family in so many profound ways."

There is a nice symmetry to this pairing as it heads to Cooperstown in 2020.

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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