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Baseball Hall of Fame

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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The biggest problem and greatest injustice with the voting for the Baseball Hall of Fame was not revealed yesterday. It is a problem and injustice that goes back several years and multiple votes by various groups of voters.

This is not to say that I agree with what was revealed yesterday and I will return to that subject.

I am tempted to take the position that all voting for the Baseball Hall of Fame should cease from this point forward. There should not be another vote taken of any kind, be it on veterans, current eligible players, sportswriters, broadcasters, or left-handed parking lot attendants, until the greatest injustice is corrected.

Marvin Miller is one of most significant figures in the history of baseball and certainly the most important figure since 1960. In the 20th century only Jackie Robinson, Branch Rickey, and Babe Ruth are Miller's peers.

In 1966 Marvin Miller was chosen by the players to head the Major League Baseball Players Association. He remained in that capacity for seventeen years when he retired. He remained an influential force with MLBPA leadership until his death in November of last year. During his tenure as Executive Director, Miller transformed the distribution of power in baseball, taking the industry from a period of owner dominance to where we are today, which some think is player dominance. Free agency, rising salaries, player control of working conditions, and generous pensions are all part of his legacy.

These changes had the effect of moving baseball to greater competitive equity, changed the relationship between players and fans, and between owners and players. Miller created player loyalty to the MLBPA that allowed players to withstand repeated attempts by the owners to destroy the union.

And yet Marvin Miller was never elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. A little over four years ago Miller wrote a letter asking that he no longer be considered for membership in the Hall. This request was turned down, but it should be noted because it is testimony to the growing

irrelevance of the Hall. How can it possibly be taken seriously when it has repeatedly rejected Marvin Miller for membership?

Yesterday the Hall of Fame voters moved to drive that institution into further irrelevance although fortunately it is an reversible action. No one! Not one! Nada! was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame on this ballot. I am not suggesting that voters have an obligation to vote for anyone they don't want to elect to the Hall. That is the voter's privilege.

We have passed through what was an era in which many used some form of performance enhancement substances, while the Commissioner, the teams, the players and the press chose not to raise the issue. Congress forced the issue or it may never have been acknowledged by anyone in baseball. Now everyone is self-righteous and ready to judge others with or without evidence.

I am suggesting that if a generation of great players are to be rejected because they played in what is called "the steroid era," whatever that is, then the Hall will risk its relevance. If there is a shadow over everyone who played in this vaguely defined era, then what of the amphetamine era or the whites only era?

Yes, but those who used steroids cheated, it is said. Well there are cheaters and there are cheaters. There is nary an athlete who has ever played their sport at the elite level, or perhaps any level, who has not sought an edge, or tried to bend the rules, or simply just cheated to succeed. Illegal bats, illegal gloves, doctoring balls, stealing the signs, hiring prostitutes to distract players the night before a big game, spies in the visiting clubhouse, the list is as long as the human imagination allows. Gaylord Perry, a self-confessed perpetual serial cheater who built a career on an illegal pitch was elected to the Hall of Fame with few raised eyebrows. The popular standard in sport and elsewhere is simple: "It isn't cheating if you don't get caught."

What is most troubling is the willingness of HOF voters to refuse to consider anyone about whom they have suspicions or anyone in a given time period. I was amazed that there were questions raised about Mike Piazza or Craig Biggio, or that some would not vote for them because of these

suspicions. For a voter to reject someone who admitted use or has tested positive for PEDs is one thing, but to reject someone on the basis of rumor or innuendo or proximity is quite another.

If this is really a legitimate standard then close the Hall for a couple of decades. If the greatest players of an entire generation are ineligible, then close the voting until that generation has moved beyond the ballot because without the greatest players as members, a Hall of Fame is diminished and risks becoming meaningless.

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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