

## **2008 Hall of Fame crop includes no sure things**

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**BY BILL KENNEDY**

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Making a decision on the names to check on this year's Baseball Writers Association of America Hall of Fame ballot is pretty easy.

With no first-ballot, sure-thing Hall of Fame names appearing on the 2007 list of 25 players eligible for 2008 induction into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, the voting here remains consistent with the past.

Jim Rice, the most feared hitter of his time in the American League, and Rich Gossage, the best relief pitcher of his time, get my vote once more. Because there are no new big names, Rice and Gossage probably have their best chance of receiving the mandatory 75 percent of the votes to be inducted. The prediction here is that Gossage finally will make it and that Rice will miss once more.

Other names checked on this ballot are two-time National League MVP Dale Murphy, and Andre Dawson, another NL MVP. The history of Hall of Fame voting shows that neither of these outstanding outfielders have received strong consideration from the electorate, so this year probably will not be any different. I added the name of pitcher Bert Blyleven, a 287-game winner, who was 3-0 in LCS games with a 2.59 ERA, and a 2-1 record in World Series games with a 2.35 ERA.

Again, being consistent, I voted for Mark McGwire, who hit 583 home runs in his career, and broke the Roger Maris (61) and Babe Ruth (60) single-season HR marks. If McGwire did something illegal in terms of using chemical substances to increase his body strength, Major League Baseball has not ruled against him. Otherwise, his name would not appear on the ballot.

It is my job or position to be a jurist in submitting my vote. McGwire's name is there. McGwire's record is worthy of my Hall of Fame vote. How can I ignore that?

You may or may not agree on what comes next. Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens probably will not be in baseball for the 2008 season, so in five years, their names could appear on the ballot. When that happens, I will be voting for them, also.

If, in the meantime, enough evidence becomes available for Major League Baseball to remove them from consideration, I will not write in their names, as did several members of the BBWAA when Pete Rose became eligible to be on the ballot. Rose was banned from baseball and after the first year, no one even wrote in his name. We all got the message. Rose bet on baseball and is not going into the Hall of Fame.

There is no message on Bonds, Clemens or even McGwire. Until MLB takes action against them for using human growth hormones or steroids, I do not feel it is my place to judge them. Their records, as presented to me with the ballot, will be my consideration.

I respect anyone who disagrees with me and thinks this is faulty reasoning. Probably some members of my own family are among them. Not my son Dave, who played 10 years of minor-league baseball (sans steroids) and got as far as Triple-A. He has told me repeatedly he does not

dwell on what might have been, despite the fact that he knows players who were not as good as him went past him to the major leagues because they used steroids. Friends even have suggested we get an attorney to sue MLB for ignoring steroid users at the expense of non-steroid users. Dave and I have discussed this and we think this is a waste of time.

From a personal standpoint, the subject of steroid abuse angers me. I cannot allow that to cloud my thought process and judgment on the subject of Hall of Fame voting. If a player's name is on the ballot, I must consider his record. That's what MLB is telling me.

When MLB tells me the "Mitchell list" is part of that record, I will adjust my thinking. But it appears to me that MLB is not ready to totally stand behind the Mitchell list of accusations against players by two former trainers who are at tempting to talk their way out of jail time. MLB seems to recognize this as a credibility issue, and probably never will advise the Hall of Fame electorate to factor the Mitchell list into its voting.

Can I be convinced to change my position over the next five years? Possibly with a lot more evidence. Definitely with punitive action by MLB. Only time will tell.

*Bill Kennedy retired in 2005 as assistant sports editor and writes freelance stories for The Times.*