

Introduction:

This is another article that I wrote for my Writing Course, back in August of 2005. This was when the baseball / steroid story really got hot with the whole Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire accusations. I plan on tweaking this a bit adding the recent players that have been accused like Roger Clemens and Andy Pettitte. Then I will probably submit it for publication. So, stay tuned

Steroids and Spitballs: A Baseball Hypocrisy

During a March 2005 congressional hearing broadcast on live television, when asked if he took steroids during his career, Mark McGwire replied, "I do not want to talk about the past". This questionable reply cast guilt over his legacy because he did not deny it. However, shortly after breaking Roger Maris' single season homerun record of sixty-one, McGwire did admit to taking an over the counter supplement called Androstenedione, which can act like a steroid.

Around the same time, Barry Bonds openly admitted taking substances called *the clear*, and *the cream*. Both of these items are categorized as prescription strength steroids designed to enhance muscle performance.

These confessions, whether direct or indirect, have branded these two baseball heroes cheaters. The consensus among baseball experts, historians, and fans indicates that both of these players should be banned from the hall of fame and asterisks should be put next to all of their statistics in the record books.

In 1991 Gaylord Perry accepted his induction into Baseball's Hall of Fame. From 1962, his rookie year with the San Francisco Giants through 1983, his final year in the majors with the Kansas City Royals, Gaylord piled up some of the most impressive numbers in major league history. He compiled 314 career wins placing him sixth on the all-time list. He owns 3,534 strikeouts putting him eighth on the all-time list. He won the

prestigious Cy Young Award for the league's best pitcher twice, once each in the National and American Leagues, making him the first pitcher in history to accomplish this feat.

These impressive statistics put Gaylord among the all-time great pitchers. But, if you ask any baseball historian or fan what Gaylord Perry was known for, most of them would undoubtedly refer to him being one of the greatest spitballers ever. His incredible accomplishments on the mound will be an afterthought. Famous manager, Gene Mauch was quoted as saying "he should be in the Hall of Fame with a tube of KY jelly attached to his plaque". An unknown former player said upon Gaylord's retirement, "the league will be a little drier (his retirement as it relates to his greaseball) now folks."

The most compelling evidence of all comes from Perry himself. After his retirement Gaylord openly admitted that he used substances such as grease to doctor the baseball throughout his entire career. The baseball almanac references several quotes by Gaylord. "I'd always have it (grease) in at least two places, in case the umpires would ask me to wipe one off. I never wanted to be caught out there with anything though, it wouldn't be professional." "Greaseball, greaseball, greaseball, that's all I throw him", admitted Perry when asked how he got batters out in tough spots. He even described faking the spitter for psychological advantage.

For almost one hundred years the baseball rulebook has clearly stated that intentionally doctoring a baseball to alter its natural movement is illegal. This means that during his entire career Gaylord Perry purposely broke the rules by throwing a spitter. In short he was a cheater. Yet, his bronze bust sits in the Baseball Hall of Fame, and there are no asterisks next to his statistics.

Mark McGwire will go down as one of the most prolific home run hitters of all-time. His chase to break Roger Maris' single season homerun record of sixty-one in 1998 is regarded as one of the single greatest moments in baseball history. He not only broke the old record of sixty-one he shattered it with seventy. He now sits second in single season homeruns behind Barry Bonds. Mark followed 1998 with sixty-five homeruns in 1999 going on to become the first player in history to hit fifty homeruns in three straight seasons. His career homerun total of 583 puts him sixth on the all-time list. These marks make him worthy of enshrinement into the baseball hall of fame.

Mark never admitted that he took prescription strength steroids. Innuendo and accusations are all that exist, but no solid proof can be found. The fact that he took androstenedione remains the only blemish anyone can pin on him. These pills can supposedly help improve performance, but there are no published scientific studies confirming this. Regardless, because there is no rule against this stated anywhere in the baseball rulebook, he cannot be labeled a cheater, unethical yes, but not a cheat.

With his career not yet complete, many already regard Barry Bonds as one of the greatest baseball players of all-time, including him among such greats as Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth and Mickey Mantle. His career numbers are amazing. He now holds the single season homerun record of seventy-three breaking Mark McGwire's record of seventy in 2001. He sits number three on the career homerun list behind only Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth with 703. With 1,843 RBI's he is twelfth on the all-time list. He has won an unprecedented seven NL MVP awards. These statistics add up to a first-ballot entry into the baseball hall of fame.

Bonds took *the clear* and *the cream*, based on his personal trainer's advice. Supposedly, he did not know they were steroids, but ignorance does not add up to a valid excuse. These acts certainly brand Barry as immoral. However, according to the baseball rulebook, he cannot be labeled a cheater either.

What we are dealing with is a hypocrisy. If we are going to punish any player by banishing them from the hall of fame or putting asterisks next to their accomplishments, even though they did not break a baseball rule, then we have to go back and kick Gaylord Perry out of the hall of fame, and put asterisks next to his records.

Although most experts admit that Bonds and McGwire did not actually break a baseball rule, they are still crying foul labeling their actions unethical degrading the integrity of baseball. I say this is still a hypocritical stance. Gaylord Perry did not have proper ethics or the integrity of the game on his mind every time he went out and threw a spitball. His cheating can be categorized as even more reprehensible than Bonds and McGwire because he actually broke an existing baseball rule. So, until you are ready to dish out punishment to him then Bonds and McGwire should be left alone.

In the end, all three of these baseball heroes should take their rightful place among baseball's immortals in the baseball hall of fame, and no asterisk should appear next to their names in the record books. To separate them is hypocritical.

Update: On August 4th, 2005 during the Mike & Mike ESPN radio talk-show, Jason Stark, one of baseball's top journalist and reporters became the first expert to jump into the fray with this specific point of view. His stance and sentiments echo mine. This came after Rafael Palmeiro, became the first top-rated baseball player to test positive for steroids. When asked if he would still vote Palmeiro into the hall of fame, he replied,

“yes I would”. He explained his position by emphasizing, “cheating is cheating”, and if we condemn these players (Bonds, McGwire and Palmeiro) then we must revisit players like Gaylord Perry, who is one of many baseball heroes who blatantly broke the rules and yet went unpunished eventually gaining entry into baseball’s hall of fame.

To strengthen his stance he stated that no documented proof exists as to what kind of effect steroids can have on a baseball player’s performance. A recent case in point would be Jason Giambi of the New York Yankees. Jason has the dubious honor of being one of the first to admit he used steroids. Since the start of the season he has been tested several times with all tests coming up clean. Most importantly, he had one of the most productive months in the history of baseball including an amazing fourteen homeruns. What does that say for those that claim these players could not ever have accomplished what they did without steroids?

Finally, when Stark was asked why he thought steroids seem to be more scrutinized than any other form of cheating in the past, he responded with a very simple explanation. Homeruns. He pointed out that homeruns are the most exciting and glorified accomplishments in baseball. Homerun records are the most recognized records in all of sports, and are held to a different and higher standard than other records. With this kind of notoriety brings microscopic analysis and extremely high expectations.

Although I agree with Starks final statement, I can only describe that point of view as bush league. No statistic in baseball can be deemed more important than another. Be it strikeouts, homeruns, pitching victories or runs batted in, holding one to a higher regard is flat out wrong. If you are not willing to go back and vilify other cheaters, regardless of what position they played or what statistics made them famous, then you

cannot do it today regardless of what type of cheating they were involved with. Steroids versus spitters, if one is acceptable then so is the other. There are no hypocrisies in baseball.