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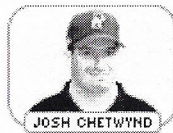
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I never thought home runs were all that exciting. I still think the triple is the most exciting thing in baseball. To me, a triple is like a guy taking the ball on his 1-yard line and running 99 yards for a touchdown.

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Why aren't we talking more about Fred McGriff?

Posted by jchetwynd on Sunday, March 26, 2006 - 08:32 AM



Since the end of the World Baseball Classic, the talk of baseball has been Barry Bonds. Detailed allegations from the book "Game of Shadows" are being described by some as the smoking gun that ties Barry Bonds to steroid use. Some pundits have argue that what makes Bonds' alleged steroid intake so tragic is that he was a first-ballot Hall-of-Famer before he supposedly started juicing.

While this is likely true, a look at Bonds compared to a contemporary - Fred McGriff - illustrates that any steroid use has not just slightly padded the stats of a future Hall-of-Fame star but has made all the difference in his legacy.

For those of you who don't remember Fred McGriff, he was a premier slugger in the 1980s and 1990s who was less than a year older than Bonds. During the first 15 full years of his career, which effectively started one year after Bonds broke into the Big Leagues in 1986, McGriff hit more than 30 home runs nine times in a season. That's just one fewer than Bonds in his first 15 years. McGriff also drove in more than 90 runs eleven times during that span. In contrast, Bonds topped that number just nine times (although Bonds did have two more 100-RBI years during that period.) McGriff also did something Bonds has still failed to do: he led a team (the 1995 Atlanta Braves) to a World Series championship. Such a title remains elusive for Bonds.

There is little doubt that during those 15 years, Bonds was a more complete player. He won eight Golden Gloves and stole at least 20 bases in all but three of his first 15 seasons. (McGriff never earned a Gold Glove and never tallied double digits in stolen bases in any season.) Bonds also won three MVP awards. (That said, McGriff did finish in the top-ten in MVP voting six times in his first 15 years - just four times fewer than Bonds.)

Still, despite Bonds' obvious advantage, it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say as late as 1999 or 2000 that Bonds and McGriff were somewhat similar

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-- Hank Aaron

offensive contributors. Bonds was better, but it certainly could be argued that his career numbers were a lot closer to McGriff's than to his godfather Willie Mays.

Of course, after those 15 years, their careers diverged. This is the period when Bonds allegedly engaged in steroid use. We all know what Barry Bonds did on the field during those seasons. He set the single season home run record and began an astonishing assault on Hank Aaron's career home run mark.

In contrast, during those seasons McGriff would be among the last players to be accused of abusing steroids. He was a lanky six-foot, three-inch player who weighed a relatively light 215 pounds. McGriff kept on hitting home runs into 2004 but, like most pre-steroid players, his numbers tailed off as he entered his late 30s. Sadly, despite his quest to get to 500 home runs - a benchmark that used to assure Hall-of-Fame enshrinement - McGriff ended with 493 homers.

To me, McGriff's career puts Bonds and his alleged use in perspective. If Bonds did in fact take steroids, it did make a world of difference in his place in baseball history. Fred McGriff is a borderline Hall-of-Famer. Bonds was almost undoubtedly a Hall-of-Famer during his first 15 years, but not miles ahead of guys like McGriff. Now, Bonds is one of the greatest to ever play the game. If steroids played a part, it's hard to argue that it didn't play a monumental part in his success.

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Re: Why aren't we talking more about Fred McGriff? (Score: 1)
by MiracleMets on Mar 26, 2006 - 09:28 AM
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Josh, a lot to think about there! As you say, the main reason people are focussing on Bonds is precisely because of his future candidacy for the Hall of Fame - and of the Hank Aaron 755 thing. This is what dominates our thoughts, and will continue to do so for some years after Bonds retires as his HOF vote closes in.

One point I'd like to raise - if Selig is planning on an investigation into these allegations, he really does need to get on with it. This entire steroids-Bonds soap-opera is likely to dominate baseball and the baseball media constantly from now on to the detriment of all