

## The Record

# Gossage delivers hardball blast to Roger, Bonds

Friday, December 21, 2007

By **BOB KLAPISCH**  
**RECORD COLUMNIST**

If anyone deserves a Hall of Fame soapbox this week, it's Goose Gossage, the can't-miss candidate on the 2007 ballot. The former Yankee reliever is all but inducted, having pulled in 71 percent of the vote last year. With just 4 percentage points separating the Goose from Cooperstown, we took the liberty of asking him what the Hall should do about the steroid era and, more specifically, Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds.

Gossage, true to his in-your-face nature, was sharply critical of both players, saying their records should be discounted if it's proven juicing was involved.

"If Roger cheated, what do the numbers mean? They mean nothing," Gossage said by telephone on Thursday. "Roger has always been a production, everything he's done has been a production. He's always wanted the attention. He's probably getting a lot more attention now than he ever wanted."

Gossage added that the three Cy Young awards Clemens won after he allegedly began taking performance-enhancing drugs "cannot stand," just as Bonds' home run record must be disqualified by Bud Selig.

"I always felt [Hank] Aaron's record was never given a fair shot," Gossage said. "It wasn't a level playing field, because Aaron had to go through so much more than Bonds ever did. I'm just glad the investigation took place. For a while, I thought the whole [steroids] thing was going to be swept under the rug."

"There's too much at stake here, too much great history, too many great players whose numbers pale in comparison to the steroid numbers. With Clemens, you just shake your head and wonder how it all happened, how it came to this. I mean, why didn't the Red Sox re-sign him [after the 1996 season]? All of a sudden his numbers started getting crazy when he was supposed to be getting older."

"There's no way [those post-1996 Cy Young awards] can stand."

Ironically, Gossage said he could understand how some major-leaguers succumbed to steroids, believing it could turn a mediocre career into a respectable one, and how it could prolong an elite-caliber player's golden era. Still, he said, "I respect the guys who didn't give in and did it the right way."

Indeed, Goose hung around for 22 years without the use of a syringe, and for that, he's about to be rewarded with an induction into the Hall. The journey, however, has been arduous. In 2000, in his first year of eligibility, Gossage pulled in just 33 percent of the vote. But he's made steady progress since then, and last year's induction of Bruce Sutter, a contemporary with similar (if not slightly inferior) stats, means Gossage's wait



AP

▲ Former Yankees reliever Goose Gossage believes the records of Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds should be discounted if they are guilty of juicing.



**YANKEES  
BLOG**

**Pete Caldera** covers the Yankees for *The Record*.

should be over when the results of the balloting are announced on Jan. 8.

When the Goose finally makes his speech at Cooperstown in July, he's almost certain to touch on two topics: the value of statistics in the pre-steroid era, and the game's unmistakable shift in favor of hitters.

Gossage admits he sounds like a broken record, talking about the timid nature of today's pitchers. But he doesn't blame them. As he pointed out: "No one is allowed to intimidate hitters anymore. One thing's for sure, every time Hank Aaron stepped to the plate, he was worried about being knocked down. That thought never crosses Barry Bonds' mind.

"The whole thing is a joke, really. Steroids, smaller ballparks, smaller strike zones, juiced baseballs, all the body armor these guys wear at the plate. Even if you hit them, it doesn't hurt.

"There are some great pitchers around today, but the odds are really stacked against them. Nobody values pitchers anymore. To be great, you have to be more than great. Probably greater than in my era. I feel sorry for them."

\* \* \*

With Hall of Fame voting deadline coming up on Dec. 31, here are the players I'm voting for:

Gossage: For all the obvious reasons, not the least of which is Sutter's induction. Goose led the American League in saves three times in an era when there was no set-up man. Ranks only 17th all-time in saves, but intimidated hitters in a way that's extinct now; one of the hardest throwers of his generation.

Tim Lincecum: The under-the radar star of the Eighties' Expos team, overshadowed by Gary Carter and Andre Dawson. Arguably the greatest leadoff hitter in National League history, although his legacy suffered in comparison to Rickey Henderson and, to a lesser extent, Lou Brock.

Still, Raines was one of the top three or four base stealers the game has ever known, even though his dominance was confined to 1981-89.

Andre Dawson: Only three players in history have hit more than 400 homers and stolen more than 300 bases: Dawson, Bonds and Willie Mays. And only six center fielders/right fielders in the Hall have more homers than Dawson: Aaron, Mays, Reggie Jackson, Mickey Mantle, Mel Ott and Dave Winfield.

What hurts Dawson is that he never made it to either of the "magic" numbers, (500 homers and 3,000 hits). And his on-base percentage (.323) was just awful. In fact, if Dawson is elected, he'll have the lowest OBP in Cooperstown.

But ...

Those 438 homers keep looking better and better, given that every one of them was steroid-free. That counts for a lot. One more thing: Of the 28 players with more than 1,000 career extra-base hits, everyone who's been eligible for the Hall is already in. That is, except Dawson.

Bert Blyleven: Only five pitchers have ever totaled more than 3,700 strikeouts (Blyleven finished with 3,701). His 287 wins carry the day here – so does his 2.47 ERA in the postseason – even though he won 20 games only once in his career. It's not entirely Blyleven's fault he finished only 37 games over .500: he was cursed by some awful Twins teams.

Jim Rice: Over a 12-year period – 1975-1986 – he led the American League in homers, slugging percentage,

RBI and, get this, outfield assists. He finished with only 382 homers and was just shy of a .300 career average (.298) but his intimidation factor was off the charts.

Gossage said: "I wasn't afraid of anyone, but Rice came the closest to scaring me. Without him, that was a different Red Sox lineup."