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NO PEDS IN HOF

By KEVIN KERNAN

December 23, 2007 -- THE end of the year means it's time to send in my Hall of Fame ballot. Three names stick out on my ballot this year, and not for the best reasons.

Mark McGwire is back for another, shall we say, cycle, while Chuck Knoblauch and David Justice of Mitchell Report fame are on the ballot for the first time. This is bad news for baseball but good news for Goose Gossage. I've been pushing Goose for the Hall of Fame for years, and his time should come this year.

I checked in with Goose and Randy Maris, son of the real single-season home-run king, Roger Maris, because ballots have to be returned by Dec. 31 and I wanted their thoughts.

Gossage played one year with Jose Canseco, 1992, before the super-sized slugger was traded to the Rangers on Aug. 31. How did he get along with Canseco, self-professed Father of Juicing? Not surprisingly, Goose did not have much to do with Canseco, one of the more pompous players of his time.

Gossage explained that their lockers were right next to each other that season in Oakland. He said they talked only once all year at their lockers.

One day, Canseco's underwear wound up in Goose's space.

"Are these yours?" Gossage asked. Canseco said they were, so Gossage dropped the underwear back in the big man's locker.

Canseco and dirty laundry go hand in hand. Same goes for baseball in the Performance Enhancing Drugs Era. That's even more reason why Gossage should be elected to the Hall while players like McGwire and those in the Mitchell Report should not, even if they do have the numbers.

And just wait until seven-time MVP Barry Bonds and seven-time Cy Young winner and Mitchell Report star Roger Clemens - who has denied all drug allegations against him - wind up on the ballot.

That's when the PED will really hit the fans.

I asked Gossage which hitter on the ballot he would vote for if he were a baseball writer. Without hesitation, he said Jim Rice, noting, "He was the only hitter who scared me."

I've been voting for Rice for years.

"He wasn't like other power hitters," Gossage explained. "He could hit the ball hard to all fields."

Just maybe, now Rice's real muscles will carry more weight in this age of steroids and human growth hormone. But probably not.

A lot of writers still don't get it and think steroids were just part of an era and HGH is just something that helps you recover from injury. HGH does that and much more. It builds bigger muscles and stronger connective tissue, and enables you to recover from workouts quickly, and many believe it improves your vision as well.

When I asked Randy Maris what he thought of the Mitchell Report in light of the fact that his father has been snubbed by the Hall of Fame voters, first the writers and then various veterans committees, he made some great points.

Randy was born in '61 and, like his brother Kevin, is a high school baseball coach in Florida. He said they now have steroid testing and that is a good thing, so he is happy more information is coming out about PEDs via the Mitchell Report and other avenues. As for his dad, Randy pointed out how the biggest slam against him was the length of his career, a 12-year career that was hampered because of a broken hand, an injury that was misdiagnosed in 1965. Voters insist Roger did not put up the big numbers for the number of years needed to gain entry into the Hall.

Imagine if Roger Maris were like so many of the players of this era who jumped feet first into the world of PEDs. There is no telling how much longer Maris would have played or how his numbers would have risen. Perhaps there would have been another 61-homer season in Roger, or maybe even a Bonds-like 73 or McGwire-like 70.

Instead of two MVPs, there might have been three or four. Tack on a few more big years and a few more MVPs and you have a Hall of Famer. HGH could equal HOF.

That's why today's numbers are so skewed, and that's why it is so difficult for me to vote anyone - hitters or pitchers - from the PED Era into the Hall.

Randy pointed out that his father's plaque is on the wall at Monument Park at Yankee Stadium, and that means so much to the family.

"To be put up there, you have to be one of the best players of all time," Randy said.

The end of Gossage's career was the beginning of the PED Era. Looking back on it now, was there anything that looked suspicious?

Gossage said he remembers one day during batting practice, standing in the outfield with Dennis Eckersley, who would go on to make the Hall of Fame in 2004. The two pitchers stood there and saw hitters with incredible bat speed, something neither had noticed to that degree in their combined 40 seasons until that point.

"We kind of just looked at each, shook our heads, rolled our eyes and said, 'What are they doing?'" Goose recalled. "There's no way that just lifting weights made that kind of difference in bat speed."

No way, indeed.