

4-1-2010

# Is Media Coverage of Steroids On The Verge Of Striking Out Baseball Stars?

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Silvestri, Nicholas L., "Is Media Coverage of Steroids On The Verge Of Striking Out Baseball Stars?" (2010). *Pell Scholars and Senior Theses*. Paper 59.

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## Controversies in Baseball

Over the last 150 years, baseball has been one of the most popular American sports. Ever since its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been known as our “Great American Past-Time”. As the sport of baseball has evolved and developed into the game it is today, there have been controversial scandals that have helped reshape our perceptions of baseball’s biggest stars.

In 1919, eight Chicago White Sox players were banned from the game of baseball forever after they conspired with gamblers to throw the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds. This went down as one of the most famous scandals in baseball history because it nearly destroyed the integrity of the sport. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1989, Pete Rose was permanently banned from baseball after he also was caught scheming with gamblers which led many baseball historians and fans of the game that he was attempting to fix his own games that he was playing in. Several years later in 1994, baseball went on strike for the seventh time in less than 20 years. As a result of this player strike, many baseball fans had difficulty returning to the game because they believed that most of their favorite baseball stars lacked a passion for the game itself and only cared about their own salaries. In 2002, baseball’s labor agreement was set to expire. Of the many issues that owners disputed amongst themselves, a steroid testing program for all MLB players was an issue that did not earn the approval of majority of baseball’s owners.

Commissioner Bud Selig was dedicated to eliminating steroid and PEDs (Performance-Enhancing Drugs) from baseball forever. In a statement at an MLB Labor Union meeting on July 2, 2002, Selig stated: "We are consulting with our experts concerning immediate steps for our minor league drug program and next steps for our major league drug program. We must act aggressively to deal with the issue of HGH." On August 30, 2002, the player’s

union revealed Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program as an addendum to the new Basic Agreement, which was negotiated at the final hour just before the players are about to go out on strike. The new policy called for "Survey Testing" in 2003 to gauge the use of steroids among players on the rosters of each MLB team. (Baseball Steroids Era) The tests that were administered were supposed to be anonymous without any repercussions for that individual player if the tests came back positive. Ironically, any baseball player that did test positive during these random steroid tests faced serious consequences.

Players who tested positive for PEDs were fined while some were even suspended by Selig. Along with this, the reputations of these players were completely damaged because all of their previous accomplishments appeared to be tarnished. According to baseball historians, Anabolic Steroids, PEDs, and Human Growth Hormone (HGH) have been widely used by many baseball players since 1988. From 1988-2007, there have been many published reports documenting use of illegal substances from baseball players in the game today. During this time period, any athlete suspected or caught using steroids had all of their career accomplishments being put into serious question. Any player whose name was linked to steroids now face the terrible consequence of having an asterisk (\*) placed next to their name. This asterisk means that while this particular player had a certain number of hits or home runs; they did so with the aid of PEDs. As a result, baseball analysts and historians have officially coined this dark age of the game the "Steroids Era".

### Media Begins To Target Baseball Athletes For Steroid Use

There has been vast media coverage of the steroids issue in baseball dating back to 1988. That year, *Washington Post* baseball writer Thomas Boswell claims Jose Canseco is "the most

conspicuous example of a player who has made himself great with steroids.” Canseco, coming off the first 40 home run-40 steal season in baseball history, denies using steroids before Game 1 of the ALCS at Fenway Park. (Roberts) Canseco is also known as the author of “Juiced”, which is a book that publicly reveals and implicates many baseball stars including Mark McGwire.

On November 18, 1988, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act made it illegal for any individual to distribute or possess anabolic steroids with the intent to distribute for any use in humans other than the treatment of disease based on the order of a physician. Although steroids were illegal and were considered a criminal offense, Selig did not find it necessary to administer a drug policy until 2003. During the timeframe of the Steroids Era, many MLB players posted statistics that were considered astronomical for any era of the game. Along with this, many of baseball’s most prestigious records were shattered. From a sports media perspective, the extensive amount of coverage dedicated to the steroids issue in baseball is understandable.

Despite the controversies over the years, baseball has always had the reputation of being a clean and honest game. The steroids issue that was evident seemed to challenge the overall integrity of the sport. As a result, I believe this is why the media felt the need to target baseball. While many baseball players were officially revealed to be linked to substance abuse in the Mitchell Report in 2007, the media took it upon themselves to only target the household names in the sport. Baseball stars such as Roger Clemens, Jose Canseco, Rafael Palmeiro, Alex Rodriguez, Andy Pettitte, and Miguel Tejada all had to explain to the media why they had used illegal PEDs during their careers. There were two players implicated in the Mitchell Report whose steroid controversies rocked the baseball world the most: Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire.

## Mark McGwire (Brief Background)

In 1986, McGwire came up as first basemen with the Oakland Athletics and had high expectations as a big-time rookie prospect. In his early years, McGwire lived up to those high expectations and proved he could hit home runs. Not only did he just hit home runs, he would hit long, majestic home runs that resembled those hit by Babe Ruth. In other words, he appeared to have a god-given talent to hit very long home runs which very few players in baseball ever had. However, what McGwire could not do even in his early years was hit for a high average or steal bases. He also played marginal defense at first base. He was very much a one-dimensional player. Throughout his career, his home runs seemed to make up for his lack of defense, speed, or ability to hit for a high batting average, which was at a mediocre .263 lifetime. He finished with 583 career home runs, which currently places him 8<sup>th</sup> place on baseball's all-time home run list. Many people believed he would have hit more home runs had he not been plagued by injuries in 1993-1994, and in 2000-2001. In 1998, he shattered Roger Maris' single-season home run record which had stood at 61. McGwire finished with 70 that season.

## Barry Bonds (Brief Background)

Barry Bonds is the son of former baseball player Bobby Bonds. Bonds has played for the Pittsburgh Pirates and San Francisco Giants from 1986 to 2007. He made his debut with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1986 before joining the Giants in 1993. Bonds' accomplishments during his baseball career place him among the greatest baseball players of all-time. He set a major-league record after winning seven Most Valuable Player awards, including a record-setting four consecutive MVPs. He is also a fourteen-time All-Star and an eight-time Gold Glove-winner. He holds numerous baseball records, including the all-time Major League Baseball home run record with 762 and the single-season home run record with 73.

## Unbalanced Media Coverage

In contemporary sports discussion of baseball's most prolific stars of the last 20 years, McGwire and Bonds were arguably the biggest household names in the game. Both of these men shared many similarities and differences which helped shape their public perception. On the field, both McGwire and Bonds have qualities which help attribute to their popularity. They both have the god-given ability to hit long and majestic home runs. Many knowledgeable fans of baseball believe that Bonds was a better all-around player than McGwire. While McGwire undoubtedly had the ability to hit home runs, Bonds had a wider range of talents. Not only could Bonds hit home runs, but he had the ability to steal bases, hit for a high average, and play well defensively. When Bonds and McGwire were in the midst of breaking baseball's most prestigious home run records, they were arguably bigger than the game itself. However, Bonds and McGwire's career accolades are now under question because their names have been linked to steroid use.

While both Bonds and McGwire played in the steroids era, the media coverage revolving around the two was unbalanced due to some circumstances which were beyond their control. As a longtime baseball fan, I am personally interested in uncovering more information about how the coverage of the steroid controversies in baseball have altered our perceptions of these athletes who have been accused, caught, or implicated of steroid use. In order to do this, I believe that analyzing the specific ways in which the media had covered the separate steroid controversies involving Bonds and McGwire is the best way to find out whether or not the media has misrepresented them. If there has been a media bias towards either athlete, has this further reshaped our views of them? From a media perspective, the unbalanced coverage that Bonds and McGwire each received during their player career stems from many possibilities.

Throughout his career, Bonds's negative outlook towards the media has been well documented. Was the media racist towards Bonds in its coverage of his baseball career? Or, does Bonds have a right to personally dislike the media for the way in which they have implicated him? For Bonds, it is evident that he never had a positive relationship with the local or national media. Bonds was quoted in an article from the *San Francisco Examiner* on May 16, 1993 : "I don't like the media, I don't like to deal with the media, and I'm not obligated to deal with the media." After saying this on record, it appears that Bonds immediately got off on the wrong foot with the local San Francisco media after just signing his new contract with the San Francisco Giants. Because of this new contract, Bonds was the highest paid player in baseball. As a result, he believed he deserved star treatment, although he had no desire to deal with the media. Most athletes accept dealing with the media as part of their duties as a ballplayer, but not Bonds. If he had not voiced his true feelings and had just cooperated with the media throughout his career, would there be a different attitude towards Bonds today?

There is a lot of evidence to illustrate how Bonds has dug his own grave with the media. In fact, the writers of *Game of Shadows*, Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams are also sports journalists for the San Francisco Chronicle. These two journalists are most famous for uncovering the BALCO scandal which linked Bonds to using performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). Is this all evidence that Bonds was being openly targeted by reporters and journalists in San Francisco? At the same time, since he was open about disliking the media, did he have all of this negative publicity coming to him? *Game of Shadows* describes Bonds as being surly, rude, and completely self-absorbed. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 111) Since the BALCO scandal arose, the media seems to have immediately jumped to conclusions regarding Bonds alleged steroid use. Thanks to many documented reports, it is assumed that Bonds used PEDs in his

baseball career, which has severely damaged his reputation as a clean ballplayer. Does all of this negative publicity stem from his ongoing personal rivalry with the media? In his case, is it justified?

With many professional athletes who “juice up” on PEDs (performance-enhancing drugs), their physical appearance drastically alters over a brief period of time. Some experience these changes in their bodies differently than others. When McGwire and Bonds started using PEDs, both men were noticeably larger than before. As my research will indicate later, the physical alterations in McGwire’s appearance were not as disturbing to the public as Bonds’ changes in his appearance. As a result of steroid use, many baseball players are able to prolong their careers and maintain a competitive edge over the opposition. Also, along with their bloated physical appearance was bloated baseball statistics. In the cases of McGwire and Bonds, they were both hitting home runs at such a stratospheric rate when they were no longer in the prime years of their baseball careers. If it wasn’t the bloated physical changes, the astronomical statistics, or racism, did the differing attitudes that Bonds and McGwire have towards their peers, fans, and the media play the biggest role in how they were perceived by the general public?

As stated earlier, any knowledgeable baseball fan realized they were each bigger than the game itself at separate junctures. Our public perceptions of these two particular athletes have varied at different points in time, especially once the steroid scandals emerged in the baseball world. While both Bonds and McGwire have accomplished great feats and have broken many individual records in their careers, my research will indicate that the media coverage throughout their careers has been unbalanced, and has been mostly partial to McGwire. By simply analyzing Bonds and McGwire’s statistics, personality, bloated physiques, and outlook towards the press, does this justify how or why the media coverage of Bonds and McGwire was imbalanced during



their baseball careers? If the steroid coverage of each athlete varies from one another, does this make it easier to be forgiving or unforgiving of some player's cases whose names are linked to steroid use? Can the media truly ignore an entire era of players? To determine whether or not there is an imbalance between the media coverage of Bonds and McGwire, it is critical to understand how their historic achievements were covered.

### McGwire & Bonds Shatter Records

On September 8, 1998; McGwire broke Roger Maris' single-season home run record. This was one of the most classic and signifying moments in all of baseball. This is because the majority of baseball fans were happy that McGwire had broken the home run record. The press attention that McGwire received during this time was surreal. Not only did McGwire simply surpass Maris' previous record of 61 home runs, he had obliterated it by hitting 70 that season. Throughout the entire baseball season, McGwire's home run chase had received extensive coverage. Every national news outlet gave this story special attention along with many smaller, more localized news outlets such as the *WashingtonPost* which did extensive coverage of the event and published an article as soon as McGwire had broken the record. (Justice) McGwire was always an athlete who was well-spoken and always knew the correct thing to say in any given situation with the media. After breaking the home run record, he discussed the true honor in being recognized as the single-season home run king. In what was seen as a classy moment in the game of baseball, McGwire stated a quote that essentially paid tribute to Maris: "I touched it (Maris' bat) with my heart...When I did that, I knew tonight was going to be the night. I can say my bat will lie next to his, and I'm damn proud of it."

When Bonds had surpassed McGwire's single-season home run record just three years later on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001, it did not have the same celebratory feel when McGwire had broken

the record. While there was a great deal of local coverage from the San Francisco press, the national media was not as involved as they had been with McGwire. In fact, in an article on CNN.com the post record-setting homerun article was rather mundane in describing Bonds achievement. What is particularly interesting about this article is that CNN.com decided to pull the story from the AP instead of sending out one of their own staff writers to cover what should be considered a historic occasion. Also, the article seems more focused on the outcome of the game, instead of the fact that Bonds had hit his 71<sup>st</sup>, 72<sup>nd</sup>, and 73<sup>rd</sup> home runs all in one game to set the new record. While Bonds acknowledged the great, historic feat he had just accomplished after taking a “curtain call” from his home fans, he was still not in a mood to celebrate because his team had lost. While the loss had knocked the Giants out of playoff contention, he did not accept the honor in the same classy manner that McGwire had. In a quote from this published article from the AP, Bonds has said: "It's just unfortunate we came up short...It was a great year all the way around." (Associated Press, 2001). This quote from Bonds shows that while he broke McGwire's record, he did not seem too enthusiastic about this achievement because his team did not make the playoffs. Was this reaction appropriate considering the timing of this monumental achievement? Should he have been more receptive to the honor and acknowledging the fact that he just shattered one of baseball's most famous and storied records? While Bonds' had an amazing individual baseball career, there was one accomplishment that has always eluded him. Like McGwire, Bonds also never won a championship in his baseball career. In *Game of Shadows*, Bonds was quoted as saying, “If I could, I would trade away all of my statistics and records for a world championship.” (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 156.) While winning a world championship should be a goal for any professional athlete, Bonds arguably had the greatest baseball career ever. Despite the negative perceptions of Bonds being rude, surly, standoffish,

and selfish, perhaps this quote illustrates that he was indeed a team player. Because of the media implicating Bonds for steroid use, his now damaged reputation will not allow him to reflect proudly on all of his individual accomplishments.

### Bonds Surpasses Aaron

The hatred for Bonds was at an all-time high in 2007 when he was chasing a new record, Hank Aaron's all-time home run record. Despite being embroiled in a scandal over his alleged use of steroids, it was evident that not many people outside of San Francisco were rooting for him to break Aaron's All-Time Home Run mark. If it was McGwire breaking the record, would the baseball nation have been more supportive even if there was still the underlying suspicion that he also was using steroids? Because of all the extensive media coverage Bonds received, was the baseball world disillusioned by the recent allegations that his hitting feats were the result of his illegal use of performance-enhancing substances? Or could this be because Bonds is black and some white Americans are still universally racist towards African-American players dating back to the Jackie Robinson era? (Chapman)

On August 4, 2007, Bonds shattered Aaron's record against the Washington Nationals at Pac Bell Park in San Francisco. It was only his 22<sup>nd</sup> home run of the season. In the peak of his alleged steroid use in 2001, he hit his 22<sup>nd</sup> home run in the middle of May! (Baseball-Reference.com) Was this because his body was beginning to break down after years of supposed use of PEDs? This is typically the common trend with steroid users even after their "prime years" of their careers. Commissioner Selig was using all of his power to combat the steroids issue in baseball. It was damaging the reputation and the integrity of the game. Along with this, many career records and accomplishments were losing respect and honor throughout the game itself. Perhaps Selig felt it was best for baseball to acknowledge Bonds' accomplishments, but to

not allow him to have the same honor and credibility that those record-holders before him had.

For a few weeks, ESPN regularly covered Giants games until Bonds would break the record. It took Bonds several weeks to hit the historic home run. Was he trying too hard to hit the record breaking home run? Was the pressure finally getting to him? Despite the fact that Bonds was disliked by many fans, he still received a great deal of national press coverage. Despite the steroids controversies looming in baseball, this was still a historic occasion. Was ESPN simply in it for the profits made off of advertising? Or were they generally interested in giving Bonds a fair shake. After Bonds had shattered the record, a ceremony was held to acknowledge this achievement. There was speculation that Aaron and Selig would be in attendance to congratulate Bonds on setting baseball history. To almost no surprise, neither of them had showed up.

While Bonds was standing in the middle of the chaotic celebration on the field, he was sporting a rare smile that not many were accustomed to seeing. It looked the weight of the world was finally lifted off his shoulders as he finally surpassed Aaron in the record books. In the video, Aaron offers congratulations to Bonds for passing his record, while saying that it took “skill, determination, and longevity to achieve this record”. Aaron played in a much different era of baseball from 1954-1976. In Aaron’s era, the game was vastly different in comparison to Bonds’ steroids era. It was more difficult for athletes to stay in great physical condition because there was little or no access to equipment or nutritional supplements. The strike zone was also much wider, which strongly benefitted pitchers. Finally, the most important detail which signified the differences in the two eras was the deeper home run fence. Aaron hit 755 home runs in an era where the average home run fence in center field was 440 feet. Generally, the center field walls are approximately 410 feet today. Along with steroid use, this reasoning is perhaps why the media did not give as much recognition to Bonds as they would have to McGwire, if he

had been the one to pass Aaron. The overall tone in his message to Bonds was fairly unenthusiastic. The overall response from Aaron to Bonds was also generic and the typical response one would expect at that given moment. However, I believe Aaron and Selig's lack of attendance in San Francisco during this historic occasion sent a great message to the rest of baseball that they both did approve of Bonds breaking baseball's most famous home run record.

In several reports and statements, Selig has had a strong desire to clean up the game. By not attending Bonds historical record setting home run, Selig and Aaron were sending a message to the rest of baseball that they were not genuinely proud of Bonds breaking baseballs most storied home run record.

### Andro – Steve Wilstein

In May of 1998, AP writer Steve Wilstein wrote a controversial story detailing McGwire's use of Androstenedione, or otherwise known as "Andro". Inside *Game of Shadows*, Fainaru-Wada and Williams list the excerpt from Wilstein's breaking story which had released during McGwire's home run chase in 1998: "Sitting on the top shelf of Mark McGwire's locker, next to a can of Popeye spinach and packs of sugarless gum, is a brown bottle labeled Androstenedione". "For more than a year, McGwire says, he has been using the testosterone-producing pill, which is perfectly legal in baseball but banned in the NFL, the Olympics and the NCAA." (Wilstein, 1998) What is compelling about the initial reaction to Wilstein's article was mostly ignored by other journalists and baseball fans. Instead of McGwire taking criticism for Wilstein's breaking story, it was the author Wilstein that suffered the consequences. Cardinals' manager Tony LaRussa proceeded to ban Wilstein from the clubhouse while also threatening other AP writers the same fate if they had attempted to invade McGwire's privacy again. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, XIV.) During this time, many McGwire loyalists and Cardinal fans

questioned Wilstein's journalistic acts. They believed that McGwire's privacy was being invaded. However, McGwire left the bottle of Andro outside of his locker in plain view of anyone who walked by it. Personally, I cannot understand how Wilstein's journalistic integrity should be questioned while he was seemingly doing his job as a reporter.

In ways, it appears that McGwire was being protected from criticism. For years, McGwire had always been a personable, well-liked athlete who was very accommodating to the media and the fans. If Bonds had been in the same scenario, would there have been as much of an uproar? At the time, steroid use was not a controversial topic of discussion throughout the sports world and these suspicions did not emerge until approximately 2003. Since Bonds did not have a great relationship with his manager, his teammates, and his own fans, would he have received the same protection from the media? Since McGwire and Bonds had broken all of what many baseball fans and historians believed to be 'unbreakable' home run records, they had each captured the attention of the baseball nation. However, as a result of the differing media relationships, it is evident that their record breaking home run achievements were each covered differently.

While the extensive, but also imbalanced press coverage of McGwire and Bonds accomplishments can be attributed to many factors, the timing of McGwire's record setting season occurred at a better time for the sport of baseball and its fans as opposed to Bonds record season. When McGwire broke the home run record in 1998, he was involved in a home run chase with Sammy Sosa. The overall public belief was that it was McGwire that should be the one to break the record instead of Sosa. In 1998, the overall morale of the game was still very low as a result of the 1994 players' strike which had driven many baseball fans away from the game. When McGwire started hitting home runs at a record pace, it brought the fans back to the

ballparks. Interest in the game had never been so high. Perhaps this is why Wilstein's article had taken much heat from Bud Selig, baseball fans and other media outlets. Selig's deepest fear was that the Andro story would develop into a scandal that would ruin McGwire and kill baseball's lucrative renaissance. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, xiv.) Of course, all of this was pre-steroids.

### Bonds Altercation With Leyland

As a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates early into his professional baseball career, Bonds was already winning MVP awards and proving himself as one of the game's greatest ballplayers. Along with this, he was also establishing which would end up becoming one of the worst reputations ever seen in the game of baseball. He quickly got a reputation for having great potential and a bad attitude. Writers said he refused to hustle and run out ground balls. Fans and teammates said he refused to sign autographs and soon came to regard him as greedy, unpleasant, and a choke artist. Along with this, he became surly with writers who asked him about his father, Bobby Bonds. Several key events led to Bonds' departure. After winning the 1990 NL MVP Award, Bonds was one of the lowest paid in the Majors and felt he deserved more. He started to question ownership and management because his teammate, Andy Van Slyke, a white ballplayer, was making more than him. Upon Bonds departure from the Pirates, he still clearly resented Van Slyke because he was being paid less, and called him "The Great White Hope", which coincidentally, was the same feeling of resentment he had towards McGwire eight years later in 1998. However, when he brought that negative attitude to spring training in 1991, it had led to a violent altercation with manager Jim Leyland in which he clearly challenged the manager's authority by not obeying team rules and frequently showing up to team practices late. Eventually, Leyland had enough of Bonds' antics. The local Pittsburgh press wasted no time in sinking its teeth into this issue and broadcasting this incident to a national front. After this

incident was over, Bonds gave an interview in which he stated to the public that “Everybody keeps making me out to be the bad guy.” From this interview, it is evident that Bonds wholeheartedly believed the club had invited TV crews to the workout in a deliberate attempt to set him up. (Golik) We will never be able to fully conclude if Bonds was indeed setup by the local Pittsburgh media. However, it is evident how Bonds felt about the media, and vice versa. However, all of this negative attention towards Bonds begs many questions. Were the majority of baseball fans that were against Bonds disappointed he used steroids, or was it due to racial factors? The overall sentiment from many MLB players and journalists argues that this was indeed the case.

## Racial Tension

While both players were of the same caliber in terms of talent level and being in the center of attention, it would only seem fair to give each man equal attention in regards to the steroids. According to excerpts from *Game of Shadows*, Bonds is portrayed as racist towards McGwire. Bonds firmly believed he was a much better all-around ballplayer than McGwire because he was well-rounded in each aspect of the game. While McGwire was known for his home run hitting ability, Bonds also had the ability to hit home runs, hit for average, steal bases, and play gold-glove defense. He was the total package, but he never was getting the attention McGwire was receiving until he allegedly decided to use steroids. While McGwire was concentrating on breaking the home run record, Bonds was having a great season as well. Unlike McGwire, Bonds was not receiving attention or credit for his achievements until he decided to “juice up”. As a result, Bonds deeply resented McGwire because he was in the national spotlight. Perhaps some of the negative attention Bonds received from the media was because of racial factors. Throughout the text, Bonds frequently describes McGwire as “The Great White Hope”.



When referring to McGwire's home run chase, Bonds was quoted as saying "They're just letting him do it because he's a white boy." While Sosa was also in the home run chase, Bonds did not believe he Sosa stood a chance to win. In that time period, I was a firm believer that McGwire was going to be the one to be the new record holder. "As a matter of policy, they'll never let him (Sosa) win," Bonds said. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, X.) We can see that Bonds assessment was accurate because Sosa did not beat McGwire out for the home run record.

Much of this racial tension between Bonds, McGwire, and the media may be fully blamed on Bonds because of his remarks towards the media. In the March 2006 issue of Sports Illustrated, Bonds blown up head is on the front cover and his head alone takes up nearly the whole page of the magazine. The authors of the article entitled "The Truth" state that Bonds would channel racial attitudes that he picked up from his father, former Giants baseball star Bobby Bonds, and his godfather, the great Willie Mays, both whom were African-American ballplayers who had experienced violent racism while starting their professional careers in the Jim Crow South. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams) While Bonds had never experienced this time of treatment throughout his childhood growing up in the suburbs of California, it is clear how his racial attitudes were reinforced at such an early age of his life. Naturally, these attitudes would carry over into his baseball career.

In discussion of this issue of race, Bonds did have some support from many of his peers. Famous ballplayers today such as Torii Hunter believe the media was racist towards Bonds in its coverage of his career. "It's so obvious what's going on," Minnesota Twins center fielder Torii Hunter says. "He (Bonds) has never failed a drug test and said he never took steroids, but everybody keeps trying to disgrace him. How come nobody even talks about Mark McGwire anymore? Or (Rafael) Palmeiro (who tested positive for steroids in 2005)? Whenever I go home

I hear people say all of the time, 'Baseball just doesn't like black people. Here's the greatest hitter in the game, and they're scrutinizing him like crazy. It's killing me because you know it's about race.'" (Nightengale, 2010) Along with this, Leonard Moore, director of African and African-American Studies at Louisiana State University, also told *USA Today*, "White America doesn't want him (Bonds) to [pass] Babe Ruth and is doing everything they can to stop him."

(Nightengale, 2010) Personally, I disagree with this assessment made by Torii Hunter and Leonard Moore because many of professional baseball's most famous and well-known stars are African-American, Latino, Asian, etc. This includes Derek Jeter, Pedro Martinez, Albert Pujols, Ichiro Suzuki, Hideki Matsui, and Derek Lee. To further make the case against racism from the media, Bonds has won baseball's MVP Award seven times in his career. At the end of every baseball season, the voting for baseball's top awards (MVP, Cy Young, Rookie of the Year) are determined in a vote by sports writers and journalists. I firmly believe that if the media was mostly racist towards Bonds, he would not receive very much recognition for his accomplishments in his baseball career. Whether or not the media had or had not been racist in its coverage of Bonds' career is still up for speculation. However, if racism was not responsible for the imbalanced media coverage that existed between Bonds and McGwire, perhaps this can be attributed to the different physical appearances of each? All people need to do is use their eyes to understand how steroids had extreme physical changes within each athlete.

### Bonds & McGwire Bulk Up

When comparing and contrasting the two athletes, one has to notice the physical appearance of each. Perhaps it was McGwire's appearance – the red hair and the freckled, craggy face that sometimes burst into a winning smile. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, XI.) Sportswriters who often covered McGwire had given him a Popeye-like image when describing his forearms

and shoulders. When McGwire bulked up as a rookie in 1987, he still looked recognizable 11 years later in 1998 when he was involved in the home run chase with Sosa. But the Barry Bonds of 2001 didn't look anything like the lithe, young Pirate who used to knock the ball into the gap, accelerate as he took the turn at first base, and fly into second with a double (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 111).

In comparison, reporters and journalists described Bonds' physique resembling that of a WWE wrestler, or a toy superhuman action figure, but not a ballplayer. As result, many baseball analysts, fans, and the national press found Bonds drastic physical changes extremely unsettling. After McGwire broke baseball's home run record in 1998, Bonds went on a new workout regimen which caused his physical appearance to drastically change. No longer the young and athletic "5-tool" player he was earlier in his career, he had ballooned into a giant that could hit for a high batting average and hit home runs like no other ballplayer could do. The most noticeable change was in his face. The front cover of the March 2006 issue of Sports Illustrated vividly exploits this drastic change. On this front cover, Bonds ballooned face is the primary focus. By spring training, his weight had increased from around 210 to 225, and almost all of the gain was rock-hard muscle. When he showed up a day late at the Giants' spring training camp in Scottsdale, Ariz., in 1999, angry at the club for refusing to renegotiate his contract, the change in Bonds' physique was startling. Around the Giants camp, they took to referring to Bonds as "the Incredible Hulk." When Bonds took batting practice, he was driving the ball farther than he ever had before. To teammates, writers and fans in Scottsdale that spring and especially to Giants management, Bonds' appearance and performance raised a fundamental question: "What in the hell had he been doing in the off-season?" (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 32)

There were many journalists around the sports world who were debated that question for

several years. Bob Costas was especially critical of Bonds drastic change in his physique. In Costas' interview on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on July 30 2007, he wastes no time in critiquing Bonds startling change in his physique. Costas points out that "At age 38, your hat size is not supposed to grow, and your shoe size is not supposed to grow by three sizes." (MSNBC) According to an interview with self-admitted steroid user Jose Canseco on *60 Minutes* on February 13, 2005, Canseco claims that he used to inject McGwire with steroids in his rookie year in 1988. According to Canseco, McGwire's physical growth was rapid. (CBSNews) Bonds had been the one taking the brunt of the criticism from the media, which does not seem fair. Both men were guilty of using the same performance-enhancing substances throughout their careers which they had used to break baseball's most historic home run records in the process. Perhaps it was simply bad timing for Bonds. When Bonds was on course to breaking all of these home run records in 2001 and 2007, steroids was a hot topic of controversy throughout the baseball world. When McGwire set the home run record in 1998, steroid use was not even suspected among players.

### The Great Excuse – McGwire Admits Steroid Use

As mentioned, there have been many professional baseball players who have caught using steroids during their playing careers. Regardless of each player's talent caliber, they have been forced to answer questions from the media their reasoning behind using these drugs. On January 11, 2010, McGwire finally admitted to the world that he indeed had used steroids and HGH during his baseball career. When McGwire was interviewed face to face by Costas after admitting his steroid use, Costas did not question McGwire's physical appearance or his god-given talent or ability to hit home runs, but rather his rationale for using steroids. In Costas'

interview with McGwire on MSNBC, he poses this question towards McGwire. According to McGwire, he claimed that he used steroids and HGH to help his body recover quicker from nagging injuries in the mid 1990's. Along with this, McGwire claims that he did not realize they were illegal at the time he used them. (MSNBC)

In the case revolving around Bonds, he testified before the BALCO (Bay Area Lab Co-Operative) Grand Jury in December 2003, Bonds admitted to using two substances believed to be undetectable steroids from BALCO. He testified that he believed The Cream was an arthritis balm and the THG (The Clear) was flaxseed oil. Both substances were given to him by his friend and trainer, Greg Anderson. Later, the book, *Game of Shadows*, documented Bonds' use of many performance enhancing drugs. Bonds was eventually indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice. His confidential testimony was also leaked to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams)

BALCO was the biggest steroid distribution company in the United States. It was created by Victor Conte. In 2003, Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada investigated the company's role in how they supplied athletes with PEDs. BALCO marketed tetrahydrogestrinone, otherwise known to many around the game of baseball as "the Clear", which was a then-undetected, performance-enhancing steroid. Conte, weight trainer Greg Anderson had supplied a number of high-profile sports stars from the United States and Europe with the Clear and human growth hormone for several years. (Baseball's Steroid Era) Anderson happened to be Bonds trainer, and Conte helped supply Bonds with the drugs that he allegedly used throughout his career. When this was revealed to the media, reporters and journalists immediately wasted no time in scrutinizing Bonds while putting all of his career accolades, more specifically his pursuit of Aaron's home run record into serious question.

As a longtime baseball fan, I noticed that many players who have been implicated for steroid use have repeatedly stated they have either used steroids, but done so unknowingly, or that steroids or HGH were only used to help them recover quicker from injuries. This has seemingly been an ongoing pattern from player to player whose names have risen to the surface in the steroid discussions. Is this ongoing pattern a defense mechanism that players have used to attempt to salvage their damaged reputations?

In the case of McGwire, he has already admitted his steroid use to the public. It seems that although McGwire is making an effort to take a more honest path than Bonds regarding his steroid use, I think that McGwire's logic to use steroids was short-sighted. Steroids, HGH, and other PEDs have many short-term and long-term side effects. While these drugs boost testosterone muscles in your body which allows for greater muscle expansion, the side effects are deadly to your health. McGwire's logic for using steroids to recover faster from injuries seems fairly contradicting. Shortly after McGwire admitted his steroid use, he was announced the new hitting coach for the St. Louis Cardinals. Did McGwire only admit his steroid use to attempt to clean up his image so he could return to the game after being out for nearly a decade?

While Bonds has not ever admitted to his steroid use, there is a great amount of evidence to suggest otherwise. According to the authors of *Game of Shadows*, Bonds decision to use PEDs spurned from his hatred and jealousy towards McGwire. While McGwire was putting up astronomical home run totals, Bonds was astounded and aggrieved by the outpouring of hero worship for McGwire. As a baseball player, Bonds considered McGwire as inferior to himself. While Bonds was known for his unusual combination of speed and power, McGwire only had the ability to hit long, towering home runs. The authors infer that Bonds recognized McGwire was on the "juice" while he himself had never used anything more physically enhancing than a

protein shake from GNC. After the 1998 season was over, Bonds believed that for him to take over the game like McGwire had, he too would begin to use steroids. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, XV.)

After listing all of this prior evidence against Bonds and McGwire, I do not believe we can fully determine whether or not the media has been biased towards either individual. While both players were stars of the steroids era in baseball, I think what I have shown here is that there historic record breaking achievements happened under different circumstances of the era. Clearly, the timing of Bonds historic home runs came at a worse time for him than McGwire's. Although they both debuted in baseball around the same period, McGwire used steroids at a more appropriate time than Bonds had because steroid use was not suspected within baseball players. If the drastic physical changes that bloated Bonds and McGwire or race were not some of the underlying issues, if the timing of each athlete's career renaissance had been switched, would Bonds have been the one that escaped all of the scrutiny that plagued him late in his career? In other words, if Bonds had broken the home run records in 1998, would the baseball nation have given him the same spotlight, attention, and credit that McGwire received? While the timing of each separate steroid controversy may explain why there could be a media imbalance, I believe that baseball fans cannot forgive Bonds because he will not come clean with the fact that he used steroids. In the case of McGwire, he was emotional in his apology to the fans: "I wish I had never touched steroids. It was foolish and it was a mistake. I truly apologize. Looking back, I wish I had never played during the steroid era." (ESPN) Since McGwire apologized, it seems that baseball fans have begun to sympathize for him because he came clean

While it is difficult to officially place an asterisk next to Bonds' name in the record books because he did not fully admit to Congress or the media of his steroid use, I believe there is so

much overwhelming evidence stacked against Bonds that suggests that he used steroids during his career. Along with this, his inability to apologize or admit his wrongdoings has further destroyed his reputation as a player. While steroids have undoubtedly had a huge impact on the statistical production in McGwire's career, I consider Bonds statistical output to be quite alarming. I believe his numbers alone are enough evidence to advocate him as baseball's biggest steroid user ever.

### The Stats Don't Lie

Throughout the steroids era, it is apparent that these PEDs have had a dramatic impact in the offensive production of almost every player that has used them. Personally, I do agree that it does take a great amount of god-given ability to play the game of baseball at its highest level, it is also apparent that baseball players have used steroids to get a competitive advantage over their opposition. In McGwire's interview with Costas after admitting his steroid use, he believes that there was not a pill or an injection that would give him the hand-eye coordination to hit a baseball. Costas easily refutes this statement by comparing a situation between two racecars. If one received normal auto fuel (non-steroid users), and the other received rocket fuel (steroid user), it is clear which car would have the advantage. (MLBNetwork) After analyzing McGwire's statistics, I support his claim that he had the god-given talent to play because he proved that in his first few years in the league (1987-88) when he hit 49 home runs and 32 home runs, respectively. (Baseball-Reference) These early statistics show that he did have the ability to succeed in the game.

According to Canseco's book *Juiced*, McGwire began his steroid use in 1989 after he personally would inject McGwire with testosterone in the Athletics clubhouse before games.



However, we did not see an increase in his offensive production. In fact, it was about the same until 1996, when he batted .312 with 52 home runs that year and 58 in 1997. Between the years 1993-94, McGwire had his worst seasons due to injury, which could mean that his body was breaking down from steroid use. In Costas' interview, McGwire revealed that he began using HGH in 1995 to help himself recover faster from injury. This idea would make sense because this is when McGwire's offensive career began to takeoff. As we know in 1998, he broke Maris's single-season record by hitting 70 home runs, and followed this up in 1999 with 65. His gaudy home run totals from 1996-1999 illustrate that steroids definitely had an impact on his totals. Interestingly enough, with the exception of the aforementioned 'Andro' article by Wilstein, suspicions of McGwire potentially using PEDs flew under the radar at first. A few years later, underlying suspicions began to arise in baseball. As we already know, this had gotten the attention of the media as well as Commissioner Selig, who instituted a drug policy in baseball shortly after McGwire retired in 2002. Since Bonds began putting up these huge power numbers up after McGwire retired, perhaps this is why the media was more critical and suspicious of Bonds, which could further explain why he was receiving negative press coverage.

When analyzing Bonds statistics, it is easy to detect trends that would indicate he was not only guilty of using steroids, but he was perhaps the biggest abuser. During his early years of his career with the Pittsburgh Pirates (1986-92) and his first seven years with the San Francisco Giants (1993-99), his statistics are a strong sign that he was a much different sort of player from the years he allegedly used steroids (2000-2007). In the early years of his playing career, he was a 5-tool player. This means that this player has the unusual ability to excel at all aspects of the game. They have great speed, the skill to hit for average, power, possess a great throwing arm while also being excellent defensively. These types of players are a rare breed in baseball.

Because of this, we can see that Bonds was obviously superior in terms of talent than McGwire.

Since it is apparent that Bonds was a better all-around player than McGwire, was this another reason why the media felt the need to target Bonds? Looking back at the combined totals of Bonds' statistics before he supposedly used steroids between '86-'98, they would affirm that he was an outstanding player and a likely Hall of Famer. In 6,600 at bats over 13 seasons, he batted .290 and hit 411 homers with 1,216 RBIs while averaging 34 stolen bases per season. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 295) Along with this, he won 8 Gold Glove Awards and 3 MVP Awards. At the pace he was playing at before '99, he was going to be a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

Now, if you examine his numbers after the age of 35, when most baseball player's careers begin to wind down, his statistics were radically different. Bonds improved his statistics in every category except stolen bases. From 1999-2004, he had much more power and drove in and scored more runs. His batting average increased by an astonishing 38 points, and his on-base percentage soared because of a big increase in his walk total, which was already high. If you track Bonds' power surge after 1999, he put together the greatest five consecutive seasons of any hitter in the history of baseball. During this period of his career, when he was age 35 to 39, Bonds batted .339, hit 258 homers, and drove in 544 runs with an OPS (On-Base plus Slugging percentage) rating of 1.316. Now, if you take those numbers and compare them to Babe Ruth's first five years with the Yankees when he was at the age 25 to 29, Ruth hit .370 with 235 home runs, and 659 runs batted in, and had an OPS rating of 1.288. (Baseball-Reference) For most baseball players, their prime years occur between the ages of 28 to 32. I believe that these gaudy statistics that Bonds put up after the prime of his career after the age of 35 are the strongest indicator of his steroid use. As we can see, Bonds' bloated statistics make it difficult to accept

his accomplishments because he managed to produce better numbers than Ruth did in the prime years of his career. While McGwire also put up extravagant home run totals during his career, his production during his career did not nearly measure up to what Bonds had done.

When asked the question if there is enough hard evidence to convict Bonds of steroid use, Costas believes that there is not enough to convict him. It is far too late to get a DNA test done and Bonds does not seem to plan on confessing at any point in the near future. However, everyone can see that Bonds has used steroids because of the overwhelming amount of evidence against him. Along with the unnatural growth in his physique and the inconsistent pattern of his statistics in his baseball career, Costas believes that any reasonable person can see that Bonds had used performance-enhancing drugs. Ultimately, I believe that along with Bonds blown up physique and inflated statistics, his troubling relationship with the media, his channeling racial attitudes, I firmly believe the main reason why the negative media coverage was slanted towards Bonds and not McGwire was because of the timing of their historic home run record breaking events. McGwire was not the only person to use steroids in his era. He played baseball in an era when there was no testing and no real dishonor in using performance-enhancing drugs. (Posnaski) Also, since McGwire admitted his steroid use earlier this year, he is already on the track to forgiveness in the hearts of baseball fans, while Bonds, who refuses to come clean to the baseball world, is not.

### Can The Steroids Era Be Forgiven?

Once steroid scandals arose to the surface in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many baseball analysts and fans predicted that this would doom the game of baseball because all of the statistics and records achieved by those players in the steroids era would be forever tainted because of the asterisk label (\*) which would be placed next to the player in the record books.

Since these players who were apart of the steroids era would be faced with the disgrace of having this label forever attached to their names if they indeed were caught using steroids, this raises a compelling question regarding their chances at being enshrined into Cooperstown.

As a longtime follower of the game of baseball, I believe that it is difficult to ignore an entire era of great players. If you simply look at all the unbelievable events that have occurred during 1988-2007, to forever banish players who have been caught using steroids would be a disgrace to the game. For a player to be eligible for the Hall of Fame, they must wait five years until after they retire to appear on the ballot. Once they are on the ballot, to get voted into, they must receive 75% of the vote from all of the baseball writers. Since these writers are obviously members of the media, we can see how the media plays a huge role in determining the fate of players attempting to enter the Hall of Fame.

Since McGwire retired in 2001, he was eligible for the Hall of Fame ballot in 2006. Since he had 583 career home runs, normally those home run totals would be more than enough to acquire enough of the voting. However, since he has been eligible, he has never received more than 23% of the vote. Although he has 11 more years on the ballot, I am unsure how his case for the Hall of Fame will fare in the coming years. More than likely, his inability to gather any votes is attributed to his steroid use in his career. Did McGwire admit using steroids so he could not only salvage his reputation, return to the game, and slowly begin to gather enough votes so he could be enshrined into the Hall of Fame? Although Bonds statistics have been under serious debate regarding their authenticity, my earlier evidence illustrates that his numbers before steroids would have put him on track to make the Hall of Fame. Since this is the case, does he deserve a fair shot to make the Hall of Fame? It seems that the overall sentiment of the media and fans around the game would indicate that they do not want him to be a part of the Hall of

Fame.

Hank Aaron, who was the previous home run king, said in an interview with the AP that Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire should be allowed into the Hall of Fame because they both are the only ones to ever hit 70 home runs in a season. However, he also believes that it is not possible for anyone to hit 70-75 home runs in a season. In the article, Aaron was quoted as saying, "I say this, and no pun intended to anybody, but I just don't believe anyone can go out there and play the game the way it's supposed to be played and hit 75 or 70 home runs. I just don't believe it, you know, without having some kind of help." (Coomer, Associated Press)

While these players such as Bonds and McGwire had made regrettable mistakes using steroids in their careers, I believe that the game of baseball will eventually forgive the steroids era. All anyone has to do is simply look at the scandals that nearly destroyed the game of baseball in the past. Many believed that baseball would not recover after the 1919 Black Sox Scandal. Then, Babe Ruth came to the surface and changed the face of baseball. With baseball struggling during the years of World War II, Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak and Ted Williams batting .406 in 1941 helped save baseball while also giving America a distraction during tough times. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pete Rose's gambling scandal and the 1994 players strike nearly ruined fan interest in the game. After that, Cal Ripken Jr., who broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive game streak in 1995, brought baseball fans back to the game. Most recently, the steroids era has put the sport of baseball through very troubling times. Was the media fully to blame for the extensive coverage of the steroids era?

If we can make the assumption that all players in baseball who used steroids were cheating, then should all of the previous records home run records held by Babe Ruth, Roger Maris, and Hank Aaron still stand? Or, should we agree with the logic that all of these baseball

players had the god-given ability to play the game of baseball? Many baseball fans would prefer that this would be the latter, but all of the players who used steroids in the steroids era are seen as cheaters. Is this because the media has portrayed them in this manner to the public? There has been cheating in the game for years (Pete Rose, Black Sox scandal, corked bats, etc.), so why do we all of a sudden critique the steroids era? Ultimately, the media coverage is to blame for this along with shaping our perceptions of certain players within the era itself.

Did the media have the right to scrutinize Bonds and McGwire for using PEDs when a great amount of other players in that era were also on the “juice”? With the media coverage of the steroids era seemingly over, how does the future look for the sport itself? As past history of baseball indicates, there has been an athlete that manages to revitalize interest in the game. The bigger question that arises is “Who will that person be?” Whoever that ends up being, it will be interesting to observe how the media portrays them to the public. Not that baseball is less popular today, but the media coverage of the steroids issue made everyone question the integrity and morals of an entire generation of baseball because great players like McGwire and Bonds had their accolades surveyed deeply under the microscope by the media and fans of the game. Whether or not the media coverage is responsible for slanting the overall perceptions of these players in the steroids era depends on the particular individual’s interpretations. Personally, I wish that as a true baseball fan I could support the players of the steroids era because of all the great records they shattered during their careers. However, I cannot and I do not foresee me ever being able to justify this dark age of the game.

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