

COMMENTARY

# Pete Rose is a sure thing for Baseball Hall of Fame now, right? Not so fast

BY BILL SHAIKIN, LOS ANGELES TIMES  
The Tribune Content Agency

LOS ANGELES

When Rob Manfred announced Tuesday that a dead man can no longer be banned from baseball, my first thought was this: If Pete Rose is going into the Hall of Fame, then Barry Bonds is too.

My second thought was this: What if neither one is going into the Hall of Fame?

Sounds silly, I know.

There is no reason to reinstate Rose except to make him eligible for the Hall of Fame. Baseball does not need a commissioner setting up a fresh recounting of Rose's sins every few years because he keeps appearing on a Hall of Fame ballot without being elected. The Hall of Fame does not need that either, and Manfred is on the Hall's board of directors.

But, over the years, that very board has made crystal clear who it did not want in its hallowed Hall, Rose and Bonds included.

The Hall did not have a rule against the election of banned players until it hurried to adopt that rule when Rose was banned. And, in 2017, amid the

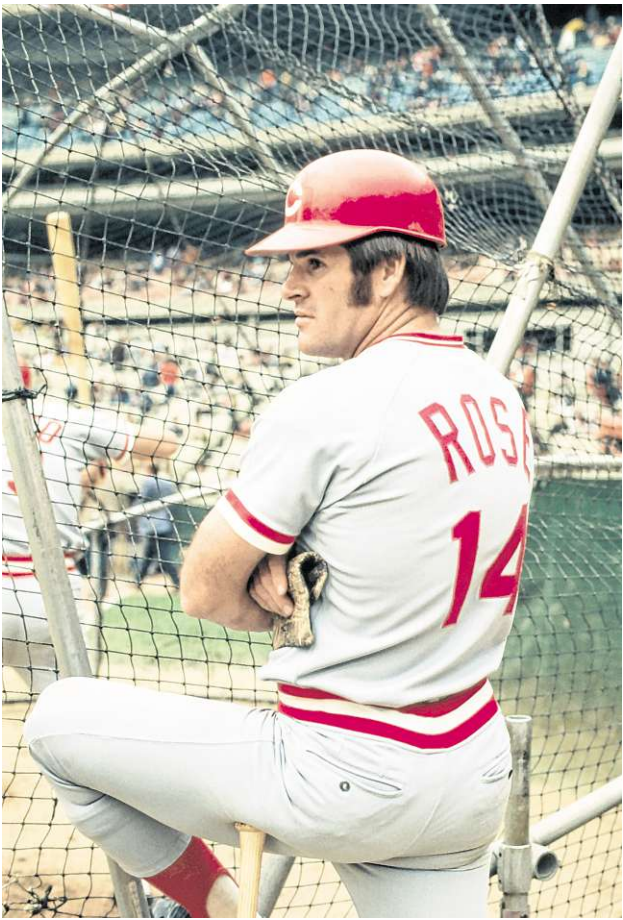
debate over Bonds and Roger Clemens, Hall of Famer Joe Morgan - then the vice president of the Hall - wrote in a letter to voters: "Steroid users don't belong here."

Rose's fate will be decided by a committee selected by the Hall of Fame, since so much time has passed since his playing days. After the Baseball Writers Association of America rejected Bonds and Clemens 10 times, their fate was left to such a committee.

In the 10 BBWAA elections, the share of yes votes for Bonds and Clemens ranged from one-third to two-thirds. In the subsequent committee election, the share of yes votes for Bonds and Clemens did not even reach one-fourth.

That committee included 16 members: six Hall of Famers; seven team executives or owners (the Angels' Arte Moreno included); two baseball writers; and one baseball historian.

The members might be different this time, but the rule is the same: 75% of the vote required for election. Of the six other players on that ballot with Bonds and Clemens, one was elected: Fred McGriff.



BETTMANN TNS

With Tuesday's announcement that a dead man can no longer be banned from baseball, Pete Rose is now eligible to be voted into the Hall of Fame.

No one else topped 50%.

Rose is the all-time leader in hits, Bonds the all-time leader in home runs. No one has more MVP awards than Bonds; no one has more Cy Young awards than Clemens.

But the Hall of Fame

instructs voters to consider "integrity, sportsmanship (and) character," and the committee voters - Hall of Famers, club officials, writers and historians - all consider themselves guardians of the game.

The Hall of Famers themselves, particularly so. They were not thrilled that Rose repeatedly showed up on induction weekends at Cooperstown, stealing the spotlight so he could peddle his autograph. They may not be amenable to sharing the stage with contemporaries they may believe disgraced the game.

"There will always be a cloud above any discussion about Pete Rose," Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt told the Athletic.

Even on whether he should get into the Hall?

"I think if you posed the question to all of the living Hall of Famers right now," Schmidt said, "I think it would almost be 50-50."

In his letter, Morgan did not name Bonds or Clemens or anyone else, but it is difficult to imagine his words would not also apply to the Rose situation.

"I hope the Hall of Fame's standards won't be lowered with the passage

of time," Morgan wrote.

"For over eighty years, the Hall of Fame has been a place to look up to, where the hallowed halls honor those who played the game hard and right. I hope it will always remain that way."

The Hall of Fame does not say how individual committee members voted. That lack of transparency, although unfortunate, could be critical in maintaining the independence of the vote, given the pressure applied by President Trump, who publicly campaigned before and after his election for Rose's induction. Manfred met with Trump last month.

If the purpose of the Hall of Fame is to honor the game's very best players, then of course Rose and Bonds and Clemens should be in it.

The track record of the committees that will decide on Rose and Bonds and Clemens indicates that those voters believe in criteria beyond statistics, so jumping to the immediate conclusion - Rose is getting in! - may be no sure thing.

On Wednesday, I checked. Bookies.com put the chance of Rose getting into the Hall at 83.3%.

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