

# Aaron still beats Bonds in my books

Barry Bonds may be ahead of Hank Aaron in numbers, but not in classiness



ROBIN  
COLLUM

Baseball fans will remember the 2007 season for one reason: Barry Bonds. The Cubs could win the World Series or George Steinbrenner could attend a Yankees game in the nude, and it would still go down as the summer that Bonds beat Hank Aaron. But it shouldn't, because he hasn't.

Bonds, who has been chasing Aaron's career home-run record for years, finally beat it on Tuesday, slamming his 756th homer into the bleachers at home in AT&T Park in San Francisco. Sullying this historic achievement, however, is his reputation as less-than-clean. One of the biggest names of what is already being called baseball's "steroid era" of the late 1990s and the early part of this decade, Bonds is known to have used chemical enhancers from San Francisco's infamous Bay Area Laboratory Co-op (BALCO) labs.

Bonds has been surrounded by allegations of serious doping for years, but he attributed his bulked-up frame to diet and exercise. In 2003, his trainer, Greg Anderson, was indicted by a US federal grand jury for allegedly having supplied athletes with steroids. Bonds denied he was involved, and later claimed under oath that his trainer had given him a cream and a liquid

substance, but that he thought they were arthritis lotion and flaxseed oil. Prosecutors maintained that these were in fact two forms of the designer anabolic steroid THG developed at BALCO, and that Bonds knew it. These suspicions, shared by many baseball fans, have only intensified as he closed in on and broke Aaron's record. He's currently under investigation by a grand jury about whether he perjured himself when he denied the steroid use.

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For many baseball fans, myself included, Bonds's record-quest is an insult to the integrity and history of the game. Hank Aaron was one of the classiest players in baseball. So classy, in fact, that he put aside any rancour he felt at Bonds's suspected steroid use and taped a congratulatory message that played after Bonds hit the record homer on Tuesday night.

"It's a great accomplishment which requires skill, longevity, and determination. ... My hope today, as it was on that April evening in 1974 [when Aaron passed Babe Ruth], is that the achievement of this record will inspire other to chase their own dreams," the message said.

To see his achievement tarnished by another player's chemist leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Bonds may have beaten Aaron in numbers, but by altering the equation with his alleged steroid use he's rendered the accomplishment worthless. Beating a record is like winning a sprint; it's meaningless unless you're running on the same track.

There are Bonds apologists out there who claim that we as fans can't be too hard on him because we are partially to blame for the prevalence of juicing in the sport. He may be a monster, they say, but we built him, and shouldn't decry responsibility now that it makes us a little bit uncomfortable.

This argument has some weight: baseball fans and the MLB did turn a blind eye in the last decade to what, even at the time, seemed like obvious steroid use. Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa, for instance, who both broke the single-season home run record in 1998, enjoyed suspicious success late in their careers, just like Bonds is now. The best sluggers of the past all had careers that followed a certain arc, with their numbers slumping as they aged. Not so this batch of stars.

But that's exactly why we shouldn't take Bonds' record seriously: his alleged steroid use, if proven true, will have given him such an unfair advantage against athletes of the past—and those contemporaries who stay off the juice—that he may as well not be competing for the same prize.

# Oilers owners just say no to drugs

But when the team ownership rejected drugstore billionaire Daryl Katz's offer, they missed a great opportunity to rescue the Oilers from mediocrity



PAUL  
OWEN

For those of you local hockey fans who can't get enough of the status quo, it's time to rejoice. The Edmonton Investors Group (EIG) has once again turned down pharmaceutical mogul Daryl Katz's attempt to buy the Oilers, and has gone on record stating that the team is not for sale.

You'll just have to excuse the rest of us here in the Heartland of Hockey for treating this like a bit of a funeral. Sure, this could just be a last negotiating ploy to force the price north of \$200 million, but if it's not, it has serious ramifications not just on Oiler fans, but on the entire city of Edmonton.

The reality of the situation is that regardless of who owns the team, the Oilers will have a new downtown arena built in the near future. If the EIG had sold to Katz (at a hefty profit from what they invested to purchase the team in 1998 by the way—it's not as though they were being lowballed), the Rexall pharmacy group owner pledged to "make a significant additional investment of time and money towards the development of a new downtown arena facility for the team and the city if that's what the people of Edmonton want."

While the EIG brought up discussion of a new arena, they have hardly indicated a desire to pay for it, even as Mayor Stephen Mandel has searched

for options besides reaching into taxpayers' pockets. With the EIG still at the helm, you can be sure that the Oilers' new home will be paid for through your rising property taxes, unless Mandel can find an acceptable alternative—a dwindling hope considering his casino idea was shot down.

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Ironically, in turning down the latest Katz offer, EIG spokesman Cal Nichols stated that "This is not about dollars. This is about Edmonton. An ownership group is best-suited for Edmonton and the Oilers."

Of course, Nichols never bothered to explain why or how an ownership group was better for Edmonton, especially when some of the owners undoubtedly don't want to spend any more of their own money trying to keep the team competitive.

From a hockey standpoint, this doesn't help the team either. The notoriously tight-fisted EIG is loath

to spend anywhere near the \$53-million salary cap. Katz, meanwhile, asserted that he would "play to the salary cap every year to help make sure [the Oilers were competitive]." As it stands currently, that's about \$6 million more than the Oilers are set to spend this season.

Additionally, get used to seeing the same semi-incompetent faces in the same jobs. Nichols, who suggested that Chris Pronger should have gotten a divorce instead of asking to be traded from Edmonton; team president Pat LaForge, who has been at the front of the "Build us a new arena" movement since it began and has a history with being less than honest with the community (both by claiming the squad that finished last season by losing 22 of their last 26 games was competitive and by perpetuating the lie that Ryan Smyth's trade wasn't about the money); and general manager Kevin Lowe, who overpaid for Dustin Penner, bungled the draft, and cried woe to the media over tea on his back deck.

So now that the ownership is no longer in doubt, all we can hope for is that the Oil can recover from what Nichols calls "collateral damage" from the offer. Because apparently Nylander not signing here and Lowe passing on Cherepanov were Katz's fault, and the team suffered horribly because of it by selling more season tickets faster than ever before. Perhaps that's the biggest problem: no matter how often the current ownership group screws up, there are still too many Edmontonians not willing to show them the door.

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