



PETE ROSE ADMITS THAT HE BET ON BASEBALL

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Is sport about points, goals and records, or integrity, sportsmanship and character? For the popular and scrappy former baseball player Pete Rose, the answer could determine if he makes it into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Pete Rose, who retired from baseball in 1986, has the career record for hits at 4,256. No other player in the history of baseball has more combined singles, doubles, triples or homeruns than he.

But Rose, who was manager of the Cincinnati Reds in 1987 and 1988, broke one of the clearest and most sacred rules of baseball, Rule 21; he not only bet on baseball but on his own team.

After an extensive investigation Rose was banned from baseball for life in 1989. He applied for reinstatement eight years later in 1997 but current Commissioner of Baseball Bud Selig has yet to rule on the request. Since he was ousted, Rose had consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Rose admits guilt

All that changed on Monday with Rose's admission, published in a new book entitled "My Prison Without Bars," that yes, he bet on baseball. Rose describes a meeting with Selig in November 2002 in which he was asked if he had bet on baseball.

"Yes sir, I did bet on baseball," he answered, according to his book.

Asked how often, he replied, "Four or five times a week. But I never bet against my own team, and I never made any bets from the clubhouse."

When asked why, Rose responded, "I didn't think I'd get caught."

Suspicious timing

For many, Rose's admission is seen as too little too late and the timing as suspicious.

"What is the motive?" ESPN's Jim Gray, who as a reporter for NBC in 1999 received death threats after asking Rose aggressively during a live interview whether he had bet on baseball, asked The Washington Post. "Is the motive to get into the Hall of Fame? To get back on the [baseball] field? Or is the motive to sell books because you need the money?"

According to baseball rules, players have until 20 years after they retire to be elected into the Hall of Fame by a committee of baseball writers. Thus, Rose has only two more chances to get

onto the ballot, December 2004 and December 2005. But after being banned he is currently ineligible.

After that, a player is referred to the Veterans Committee, an 85-member group of whom about two-thirds are members of the Hall of Fame. According to Sports Illustrated writer Tom Verducci, many Veterans members have spoken publicly or privately against letting Rose in.

“Some have even threatened to boycott the Hall of Fame ceremonies if he is elected. So his best chances of getting into the hall are during the next two years,” Verducci explained.

That sentiment is shared by former commissioner Fay Vincent who said he was disappointed with Rose’s admission, though he admitted the sport culture contributed to the situation.

“There is no sense of regret or shame for dragging baseball through the muck,” he said. “So, when you look at Rose today, you have to realize we’re at fault too. We teach great athletes their whole lives that they are above the law. We create the monster, then we have to go out and deal with it,” he added.

Rose supporters

Rose believes that he should be reinstated because he admitted wrongdoing.

“If I had been an alcoholic or drug addict, baseball would have suspended me for six weeks and paid for my rehabilitation,” he writes. “The distinction between drugs, booze and gambling told me that baseball was interested in punishment, not treatment.”

Many agree. Despite his banishment, Rose has remained a popular hero, celebrated for his energy and dramatic headfirst slides into base. Having grown up on the rough part of Cincinnati, he is the gutsy sportsman nicknamed “Charlie Hustle” for how he played during his 24-year career. He received standing ovations in 1999 and 2002 when he was allowed on a baseball field during various commercial promotions.

Marge Schott, the Reds’ owner when Rose was manager, thinks that Rose should be in the Hall of Fame, “because he is baseball.”

Awaiting a decision

Selig, who has long insisted that Rose admit to gambling before any consideration of his status is examined, hasn't indicated whether he plans to reinstate Rose.

Hall of Fame president Dale Petroskey said Tuesday that no consideration is being given to changing the rules to extend Rose's eligibility.

By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra

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