



## BASEBALL PLAYER BONDS NEARS HISTORIC MARK

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*San Francisco Giants outfielder Barry Bonds is on the verge of surpassing baseball legend Babe Ruth for second on the career home runs list. Usually such a milestone is cheered, but in this case, allegations that Bonds has used steroids have prompted a debate over racism and cast a shadow over his achievement.*

Statistically, Bonds is undoubtedly one of the greatest players of all time. His 73 home runs in 2001 are a single-season record. Bonds also is the only player to have 500 home runs and 500 stolen bases in a career.

On May 20, he hit his 714<sup>th</sup> home run, matching Babe Ruth's total and placing him behind only Hank Aaron's 755.

However, along with several of his fellow players, Bonds is suspected of using illegal steroids. "There is no other conclusion you can draw from the evidence that we laid out in our book but that he knowingly used drugs from '99 through the 2003 season," said Lance Williams, co-author of a book called "Game of Shadows" that chronicled Bonds' alleged use of steroids, on the April 3 NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

### **Bonds backlash**

Other alleged steroid users, such as Rafael Palmeiro, Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire, have retired and faded out of the public eye. But Bonds keeps hitting home runs and attracting negative attention.

When Bonds leaves the friendly confines of AT&T Park in San Francisco, he is often booed and heckled by angry fans. In April, a baseball fan in San Diego threw a plastic syringe at Bonds. When Astros pitcher Russ Springer hit Bonds with a baseball, he received a standing ovation from the Houston crowd.

Tyler Snyder, the fan who caught Bonds' 714<sup>th</sup> home run, was asked if he planned to give the ball to Bonds. "Probably not, I hate that guy," he told reporters, according to Associated Press. Even some of his fellow players have spoken out against Bonds.

Philadelphia Phillies pitcher Corey Lidle openly questioned the legitimacy of Bonds' home run total. "Basically, he had decisions to make," Lidle told the Philadelphia Daily News. "There are consequences in every decision. He's a grown-up. He's got to live with those consequences."

## **Racism allegations**

There also have been allegations that the negative reaction to Bonds' success is driven by racism.

The situation has been compared to that of Hank Aaron, also an African American, who received death threats when he surpassed Ruth in 1974.

"White America doesn't want him to [pass] Babe Ruth and is doing everything they can to stop him," Leonard Moore, director of African and African-American studies at Louisiana State University told USA Today in March. "Once Bonds passes Ruth, there's nothing that will make [Ruth] unique and they're scared. And I'm scared for Bonds."

Minnesota Twins outfielder Torii Hunter echoed these allegations. "He has never failed a drug test and said he never took steroids, but everybody keeps trying to disgrace him," Hunter told USA Today.

"How come nobody even talks about Mark McGwire anymore? Or [Rafael] Palmeiro? Whenever I go home, I hear people say all of the time, 'Baseball just doesn't like black people.'"

In the spring of 2005, Bonds himself addressed the race issue. "Blacks, we go through a little more, and that's the truth," Bonds said in a news conference, according to The Washington Post. "Unfortunately, I said it. And I'm not a racist, but I live in the real world."

However, Oakland Athletics third baseman Eric Chavez disagreed that racism is behind the skepticism of Bonds' accomplishments.

"Barry was my childhood hero growing up, and what he's going through I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. But as far as this being race related? I totally disagree. If Big Mac [McGwire] was playing, he'd be in the same boat," he said in an interview with USA Today.

## **Bonds' future**

Barring injury, Bonds is expected to surpass Ruth any day. His focus will then turn to Aaron's 755 home runs.

Two years ago that record seemed well within reach, but after sitting out most of last season with injuries and still showing some pain, the 41 year old may have to return for the 2007 season to have a chance at that mark.

*-- Compiled by Jeremy Lundblad for NewsHour Extra*

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