

The 'record' that isn't

by *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Even fans and players who blindly stood behind Barry Bonds must now concede the damage has been done. If Bonds is convicted of federal charges of perjury and obstruction of justice for his testimony four years ago to a grand jury investigating the use of steroids, he will have forever tainted one of the greatest achievements in baseball and forced the sport to address the matter in its record books.

And a conviction will prove once and for all that although Bonds was an elite player, his record-breaking performance on Aug. 8 in San Francisco, when he topped Hank Aaron's all-time record of 755 home runs, was not only a chemically induced illusion but an act of outright fraud. While fans have a right to feel betrayed, the ultimate victim of that fraud was Aaron.

Even if Bonds is found innocent of the charges, the publicity from the trial, as well as the indictment itself, which revealed "positive tests for the presence of steroids and other performance-enhancing substances by Bonds and other professional athletes," will have further sullied his reputation and that of baseball.

But as arrogant as Bonds has been about this whole affair, the culpability isn't only his.

For far too long, Major League Baseball dragged its feet, and when it finally got down to confronting the issue head-on, the players' union threw up hurdles until the U.S. Senate turned up the heat and forced the union to capitulate. Unfortunately, as the Bonds case has so dramatically shown, the new policy on performance-enhancing drugs and other substances, widely acknowledged as the toughest in pro sports, came too late. If Bonds is found guilty, baseball will have to pick up the razor-sharp glass shards.

That challenging and thankless job will fall to Commissioner Bud Selig. While many fans will no doubt ask that Bonds' record be stricken, the more practical alternative probably would be to attach an asterisk behind Bonds' name and record. Either way, it will be a painful moment for baseball and especially for Selig, who can otherwise point with pride to the many accomplishments during his tenure.

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