

## Aaron won't catch Bonds; commish should follow

by Nick Canepa

Henry Aaron is adamant. Firm. As usual. He won't be in attendance when or if Barry Bonds breaks his career home run record. Not even if Bonds does it in Atlanta, which is where Aaron works.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, on the other hand, is noncommittal. Not firm. As usual.

Neither man should be there. It would be great if Bonds couldn't make it, either, but although the chase has slowed to a troll's pace, a finish seems inevitable, with Bonds nine home runs shy of Aaron's cherished mark of 755.

Too bad the ballpark couldn't be empty when he does it.

"I will never reconsider my decision," Aaron said last week, when asked if he would attend if Bonds had the opportunity to break the record in Atlanta (Aug. 14-16). "No, I won't be there."

Interesting. You have to figure he attends most Braves home games, in that he's a club VP.

As for flying off to watch Bonds, Aaron said: "I traveled for 23 years and I just get tired of traveling. I'm not going to fly to go see somebody hit a home run, no matter whether it's Barry or Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig or whoever it may be. I'm not going anyplace."

Hilarious. Aaron wouldn't have to go anyplace if Bonds were to do it in Atlanta. Aaron hasn't said he will pass because he believes Bonds has done plenty of this through chemistry, but then he doesn't have to.

"I wish him all the luck in the world," Aaron said.

Sure he does.

Some of these former boppers - just give a listen to Frank Robinson - are upset because they feel their records are being vandalized, and rightfully so. No other sport values its history more than baseball, and

nobody respects these records more than Selig. Then why not suspend the player? He has "best interest of baseball" power, even without evidence.

But that would take a spine.

Back in late 2004, when word of Bonds' statement to the grand jury in the BALCO case leaked out, Aaron, who had been a fan of Bonds, turned.

"First, since I played the game myself, I know that you can't put something in your body to make you hit a fastball, change-up or curveball," he told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution at the time. "The only person who can do that is the good Lord."

On that I completely agree. Bonds was a great hitter long before his head took on a load of helium. But, suspicion grows when athletes - not just Bonds - grow better as they grow long of tooth.

"At that age (Bonds was 40 at the time), you have to ask: 'Did he accomplish all this by rejuvenating his strength from day to day with those substances?'" Aaron continued. "I know that, when you reach a certain age, you just don't bounce back as quickly as you think you can when you're playing all these games.

"Drugs won't help you hit the ball. But they can make you recuperate consistently enough to hit the kind of home runs these guys are hitting."

For years, Bonds was never tested for steroids, but that's not his fault. It's Selig's and baseball's. It was great when Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were "saving" the game with their home run binges after the commissioner shut down baseball and the 1994 World Series.

Now, they're paying a different price, and Selig doesn't seem eager to work his way out from the inside of this dilemma.

The problem with Selig is that he has yet to say if he will be in attendance when Bonds breaks the record. He should announce he won't be there, on the grounds it's going to be all but impossible for him to know exactly when the record will fall.

Bonds just went 14 games without hitting a home run. Say he hits No. 754 sometime next month. Say he doesn't hit another for 20 games. What's Selig supposed to do, follow him around the country until he does it?

All Selig will say is: "I'll decide at the appropriate time."

But he knows there can't be an appropriate time because no one can say when that appropriate time will be, although he shouldn't go, regardless. These men have better things to do with their days than waste them on a guy who obviously doesn't give a damn about a whole lot. Barry Bonds is all for Barry Bonds.

The Barry has a stash of personal memorabilia he has gathered over the years, stuff the Hall of Fame wouldn't mind putting on display. But he seems to have his own Hall - in his own house.

"I'm not worried about the Hall," Bonds said recently. "I take care of me."

He says he has a right to decide what to do with his stuff, and that he does. So he shouldn't be the least bit concerned if Aaron and the commissioner express their right to avoid him like smallpox.

They should just send Bonds a telegram, from wherever they are. "Nice going, Barry. Glad I wasn't there."

Integrity is what matters here. Henry Aaron is showing it. Bud Selig should, too.

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