

# Fair or Foul: Analysis of 2017 Baseball Hall of Fame Voting

Michael Dane Peppers  
*Marquette University*

---

## Recommended Citation

Peppers, Michael Dane, "Fair or Foul: Analysis of 2017 Baseball Hall of Fame Voting" (2019). *Master's Theses (2009 -)*. 556.  
[https://epublications.marquette.edu/theses\\_open/556](https://epublications.marquette.edu/theses_open/556)

FAIR OR FOUL: ANALYSIS OF 2017 BASEBALL HALL OF FAME VOTING

by

Michael Peppers

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University,  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 2019

ABSTRACT  
FAIR OR FOUL: ANALYSIS OF 2017 BASEBALL HALL OF FAME VOTING

Michael D. Peppers

Marquette University, 2019

Professional baseball writers play the main role in deciding if former Major League Baseball players will be enshrined in the Hall of Fame. This time-honored tradition has become more complex now that several players from the “Steroids Era” have become eligible for consideration. This issue has divided writers and baseball fans across the country. In the end, the Hall of Fame offers subjective rules for writers to follow, leaving them to figure it out for themselves and in many ways the entire nation. This study sought to determine how baseball writers legitimized their voting decisions for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens and examined the implications of the presentation of those choices. Using theoretical principles about legitimacy and ethical persuasion, this study analyzed the rhetoric of several baseball writers justifying their 2017 Hall of Fame ballot decisions. The writers presented their voting decisions in a variety of ways that mostly adhered to principles of legitimacy and ethical persuasion. However, this study identified key areas for needed improvement in the way baseball writers explain their ballot decisions. Those areas include a more consistent use of fact-based arguments, more thorough presentation of context about players and steroid use, and greater effort to create a balance of understanding between them and public.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I. INTRODUCTION.....1
  - A. Baseball’s Significance in American History.....1
  - B. Purity Ideal And Steroid Reality.....2
  - C. Steroid Suspicion and The Hall of Fame.....4
  - D. Current Research on Major League Baseball and Steroids.....6
- II. RESEARCH FOCUS.....6
- III. THEORY.....7
  - A. Theories on Legitimation.....7
  - B. Theories on Ethical Persuasion.....10
- IV. METHOD.....13
- V. TRUTH CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....14
  - A. Peter Abraham, *Boston Globe*.....15
  - B. Mark Zuckerman, *MASN*.....17
  - C. Mike Berardino, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*.....19
  - D. Scott Miller, *Bleacher Report*.....21
  - E. Truth Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways.....23
- VI. RIGHTNESS CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....23
  - A. Peter Abraham, *Boston Globe*.....24
  - B. Nick Cafardo, *Boston Globe*.....26
  - C. Susan Slusser, *San Francisco Chronicle*.....28

	D. Ken Davidoff, <i>New York Post</i> .....	30
	E. Rightness Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways.....	31
VII.	SINCERITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....	32
	A. Randy Miller, <i>NJ.com</i> .....	33
	B. Henry Schulman, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> .....	34
	C. Ken Rosenthal, <i>FOX Sports</i> .....	36
	D. Mark Purdy, <i>The Mercury News</i> .....	38
	E. Sincerity Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways.....	40
VIII.	RESPECT CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....	40
	A. Tom Haudricourt, <i>Journal Sentinel</i> .....	41
	B. Randy Miller, <i>NJ.com</i> .....	43
	C. Respect Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways.....	45
IX.	EQUITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....	45
	A. Nick Cafardo, <i>Boston Globe</i> .....	46
	B. Ken Davidoff, <i>New York Post</i> .....	48
	C. Ron Kroichick, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> .....	51
	D. Dan Shaughnessy, <i>Boston Globe</i> .....	52
	E. Equity Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways.....	54
X.	SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS.....	55
	A. Ann Killion, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> .....	55
	B. Jon Morosi, <i>MLB.com</i> .....	57
	C. Social Responsibility Analysis: Key Takeaways.....	59
XI.	DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS.....	59

- A. Issue 1 – Lack of Fact-Based Arguments.....60
- B. Issue 2 – Not Providing Sufficient Context.....61
- C. Issue 3 – Truthfulness & Equity.....62
- D. Recommendations.....62
- E. Future Considerations.....63
- XII. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....64

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Michael Peppers

I first want to thank my LORD Jesus Christ for providing me with the opportunity and intelligence to write this paper and complete graduate school. I also want to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Sarah Feldner, Dr. Kati Berg, and Dr. Jim Pokrywczynski for guiding me through this process. Next, I'd like to thank the Norman H. Ott Memorial Writing Center and friend Christine Jacobs for proofreading this paper and ensuring the formatting met all required standards. Finally, I want to thank my lovely wife Sarah and young son Zeke for supporting me through the long writing and rewriting process.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Baseball's Significance in American History**

Baseball has a long history of shaping American culture. For decades, it was often referred to as the national pastime. Story (2001) noted that the surge of baseball's popularity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was largely because the game had a way of connecting men with their youth. In other words, it was a much-needed outlet. As large urban cities and factories began to boom across America, people looked for ways to relieve the tensions of their increasingly busy lives. While baseball was popular among many socio-economic classes, it could be especially appealing to the poor as it seemingly offered hope of achieving an American dream of money and fame if one could become a professional player (Voight, 1983). These historical references show that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, baseball had become a common sport to which many people of different backgrounds could relate.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, early sports journalism played a big role in further elevating the status of baseball in America. Dedicated baseball writers in local newspapers and national journals like "Sporting Life" kept Americans informed about their favorite teams and players. Charles Ponce de Leon (2002) pointed out that many sports writers of this time worked in cahoots with athletes and baseball promoters to produce articles that were favorable to the game. Eventually, various names like Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson and several other players rose to a heroic level of prominence among the public. A key element in this early baseball reporting was the communication about



player statistics. Mrozek (1983) noted that the individual stats of players further established them as heroes among the public. The development of box scores allowing for the comparison of individual statistics helped establish a “contextual marker of greatness” among players and became a hallmark for the game (Roessner, 2009, p. 46).

### **Purity Ideal And Steroid Reality**

According to Mandell, the heavy emphasis on individual player statistics and records in baseball established a desire for “clean,” or honest heroes (Mandell, 1984, p. 185). This speaks to the ideals of integrity and purity within the game of baseball. Like American history, baseball history has struggled to live up to the moral ideals as it once excluded all non-white players from entering the league under a “gentlemen’s agreement” (Editors, 2017). There has also been testimony of the use of amphetamines or stimulants that helped boost player energy to make it through a long season. Hall of Fame shortstop Mike Schmidt told the *New York Times* his use of the amphetamines was the result of peer pressure (Chass, 2006). Imperfections aside, baseball Hall of Fame embodies the ideal of purity. Baseball Hall of Fame President Jeff Idelson was once quoted as saying that the hallowed home for the game’s heroes represented the “soul” of baseball (Nusbaum, 2016). Given the statistical and moral standards needed for individuals to gain entry, there has always been an implied preference for all inductees to reflect the ideal of purity.

The ideals of baseball purity are threatened when there are concerns of players using steroids, or performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), which can give them an unsanctioned advantage over other players. Steroids did not officially become a banned

substance in Major League Baseball until 1991. It wasn't until 2003 that the players' union agreed to allow survey testing of players to gauge the frequency of steroid use in the game (Editors, 2012). There were no punishments for results of the survey testing, but the league mandated testing of all players for the 2004 season with penalties after about 5-7% of the survey tests came back positive for steroids (Nightengale, 2014). Baseball's steroids controversy grew in 2004, when published testimony from an investigation into the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative (BALCO) revealed that some players, including the soon-to-be career home run record-holder Barry Bonds, admitted taking steroids (Editors, 2018). In 2005, several well-known players including Sammy Sosa, Mark McGwire, Rafael Palmiero and the retired Jose Conseco testified before the House Government Reform Committee about the status of steroids in baseball. Conseco, who had published a book earlier in the year alleging widespread use of steroids in the game, said during the hearings that steroids had been as common in baseball as "a cup of coffee" (Sheinin, 2005).

In 2007, Senator George Mitchell published the "Mitchell Report," which disclosed his findings after investigating the prevalence of steroids in Major League Baseball per the request of then league Commissioner, Bud Selig. In the more than 400-page report, about 86 names were reportedly connected to steroids, with famed pitcher Roger Clemens being referenced 82 times (ESPN.com new services, 2007). Clemens was in the final year of a decorated career in which he was a 10-time All-Star, 7-time Cy Young Award winner for best league pitcher, a 1986 American League MVP, and a two-time World Series Champion ("Roger Clemens," MLB.com). He testified before Congress

in 2008, claiming he never used steroids. He was eventually charged with perjury, but was acquitted of those charges in 2012 (Macur, 2012). To this day, Clemens publicly maintains that he never took steroids. Barry Bonds was also heavily listed in the Mitchell Report and faced similar legal troubles around the same time. After being investigated for his connection with BALCO, he was charged with perjury in 2011 for giving an evasive answer about his alleged use of steroids to a federal grand jury in 2003 (Associated Press, 2015). Bonds admitted that he took performance enhancing drugs, but said the substances were provided to him by his trainer, Greg Anderson, who allegedly misled him to believe he was taking flax seed oil and arthritic cream (Foxsports, 2011). The Justice Department dropped the perjury charges in 2015.

### **Steroid Suspicion and The Hall of Fame**

An important question that continues to be wrestled with is whether players who are guilty or under heavy suspicion of steroid use should be elected into the Hall of Fame. There are a variety of opinions on this issue among fans and players. Major League Baseball has not taken a definite position. When asked what advice he'd give writers on how to handle Hall of Fame voting, current league commissioner Rob Manfred recently said the only advice he was comfortable giving was "everyone should keep in mind the difference between players who tested positive and were disciplined on the one hand, and players where somebody has surmised that they did something on the other" (Stark, 2015). Ultimately, it is left for the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA) to decide the legacy of these players.

The BBWAA is the main voting body that elects individuals to the Hall of Fame. Each of the members covers baseball for a newspaper, magazine or major website. Members are required to be with the organization for 10 years before being eligible to participate in Hall of Fame voting. They can also continue to vote for at least 10 years after ending their active membership. (Editors, About). A total of 442 ballots were cast for the 2017 Hall of Fame vote (Thibodaux, 2019). The BBWAA also votes on yearly league honors like Most Valuable Player and Rookie of the Year. A player must receive at least 75% of the BBWAA vote to be elected to the Hall of Fame. Players failing to receive 75% of the vote must receive a minimum of 5% of the vote to remain on the ballot for next year. The BBWAA allows writers to vote for up to 10 players each year. In 2014, the BBWAA limited the number of years a player could be on the ballot without meeting the 75% threshold from 15 to 10 (Bloom, 2014). The Baseball Hall of Fame also has a voting guideline, referred to as the “character clause,” which states: “voting shall be based upon the player’s record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played” (Editors, Hall of Fame Voting Requirements). There is no such voting guideline for any other hall of fame honoring athletes of a major American sport. Interpretation of how this character clause should apply varies among BBWAA voters. Voters who publish their ballots with written explanation for their reasoning often clash on this very issue.

## **Current Research on Major League Baseball and Steroids**

There has been plenty of research about the issue of steroids and baseball. One of the most comprehensive works was *Game of Shadows* (Fainaru-Wada, Williams, 2006), which chronicled Bonds' alleged steroid use following his supposed jealousy of fellow players Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire after their now infamous 1998 home run race. In the academic setting, the article "756\* - The Legitimacy of a Baseball Number" reviewed how league officials, broadcasters and former players made statements or took actions that cast doubt on the legitimacy of Barry Bonds' home run record after he set the new mark in 2007 (Boyd, 2009). However, there has not been much writing focusing on the BBWAA. Some current and former members have offered internal criticism of the organization over issues like membership selection (Holtzman, 1996) and voting process (Abraham, 2014). Yet, internal criticism alone is not sufficient for a proper evaluation of any organization. As gatekeepers to the public institution of the Baseball Hall of Fame, the voting habits of BBWAA writers should be analyzed for the sake of accountability. Not only should the public understand the reasoning behind voting decisions, but the rhetoric supporting those decisions should also be reviewed to ensure it is done in a fair and ethical manner.

## **RESEARCH FOCUS**

The specific aim of this research was to analyze the stated rhetoric of various BBWAA writers who publicly explained their 2017 ballot votes and examine their arguments supporting their vote for or against Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. Writers

often put these two players in the same category when discussing steroids in baseball and rarely do voters exclude or include one without the other in their voting. Both players have received a close percentage of votes each year since being on the Hall of Fame ballot. The BBWAA's decision of whether to allow either of these two players in the Hall of Fame will impact how they are viewed by future generations. If the steroid-linked careers of Bonds and Clemens didn't receive a fair BBWAA review, it's reasonable to think that other future Hall of Fame candidates facing similar suspicions of steroid use won't receive one either. Furthermore, if the voting rhetoric of the BBWAA is not legitimate and ethical, the Hall of Fame's election process should be questioned and perhaps changed to ensure its integrity. As such, this research was based on the following questions:

RQ1: How do baseball writers legitimize their 2017 Hall of Fame voting choices for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens?

RQ2: What are the ethical implications of the presentations of the writers' choices?

## **THEORY**

### **Theories on Legitimation**

To examine the voting process, this study used a framework that examined legitimacy based on the work of Jurgen Habermas. Legitimacy is the process of conforming to recognized principles or acceptable rules and standards. This concept is important for healthy public discourse because it provides a structure for determining which ideas and statements are worthy of recognition and which ones should be

disregarded. Furthermore, the goal of the discourse should be to reach a mutual understanding among the parties involved. Habermas developed a framework for analyzing the legitimacy of communicative action. He posited that proper discourse within a society should be based on validity claims appealing to the values of truth, rightness and sincerity (Habermas, 1990). Thus, proper discourse can only occur when participants first agree on principles of each value and commit to their adherence when speaking.

Truth is a universal standard requiring statements to be based on fact and reality. It is more than reasonable for anyone engaged in or observing discussion to expect that any exchange of ideas be based in verifiable reality. In other words, something other than the rhetoric of the speaker must corroborate their claims. Habermas noted that truth must be the clear intention of the speaker for the hearer to better understand the claim and thus share the communicated knowledge (Habermas, 1979). In addition to promoting clarity, truth in communication helps give the hearer confidence in the speaker's words. Hearers expecting the standard of truth in communication will be less likely to consider claims based on falsehoods or unverifiable facts.

The concept of rightness is a little more nuanced, as it deals with whether the speaker has the proper knowledge or authority to make certain statements. Anyone who makes statements seemingly beyond their understanding without a source to back them cannot be viewed as credible. Habermas said statements meeting the rightness standard should allow the speaker and hearer to come to an agreement about the claim

based on normative backgrounds (Habermas, 1979). Thus, whatever the acceptable forms of authority verification required for a claim to be credible should be followed. This could be a speaker having a specific educational background before speaking authoritatively on a topic, or citing credible secondary sources.

Finally, the standard of sincerity assesses whether an individual's statements are genuine and believable. It should be clear that a person means what they say and says what they mean. According to Habermas, practicing the value of sincerity within discourse helps create trust between the speaker and the hearer (Habermas, 1979). Trustworthiness between these two entities is foundational for healthy public discourse. Thus, whether combined in analysis, or applied separately, the values of truth, rightness and sincerity set a strong standard for acceptable discourse.

These three concepts form a solid framework for investigating the legitimacy of an argument. Feldner and Meisenbach (2007) used the framework to analyze the rhetoric of a public activist campaign to Save Disney through the lenses of truth, rightness and sincerity (Feldner, Meisenbach, 2007). From this perspective, they explained how the campaign against the global corporation revealed a lack of legitimacy in several of Disney's public claims about itself. Furthermore, the Save Disney study demonstrated the importance of having a process through which claims from any entity can be challenged based upon universally held standards within a society. This process was reflected in the Habermasian concept of an ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1984), in which societal parties exchange ideas and come to an understanding.



Having universally agreed-upon standards like truth, rightness and sincerity helps establish accountability among societal parties. Healthy debate works best when there is an expectation for everyone to play by the same rules, regardless of power or influence. When considering the historical relationship between sports journalists and the public, writers had the lion share of influence simply because their newspaper allowed them to regularly mass produce messages in a way not yet available to the public. While sports reporters still hold a considerable amount of influence over the average individual, social media and even online comment sections below articles now allow the public to more frequently mass communicate their opinions. Thus, BBWAA writer claims about Hall of Fame voting are more susceptible to public challenges based on principles like truth, rightness and sincerity. Those same principles were used in this study to analyze the various claims of BBWAA writers when explaining their decisions for or against Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens on their 2017 Hall of Fame ballots. Examination of truth in writers' statements sought to discover a factual basis for any claims about both players. The analysis of rightness asked the question of whether the writer had the proper authority or insight to definitively make a certain claim. Finally, writers' statements were also examined for any hint of insincerity or even dishonesty when making claims relating to Bonds and Clemens.

### **Theories on Ethical Persuasion**

While analysis through the lenses of truth, rightness and sincerity helps address the merit of a claim, additional criteria is required to evaluate the potential societal

impact. Words exchanged in public forums can have strong impact on public perception and emotion surrounding an issue. Such effects can be magnified depending on the number of people who hear the message and the frequency of its communication. Special attention should also be given to communication aimed at persuading the public to form a consensus on an opinion or take a specific course of action. This type of communication can be especially powerful, warranting some accountability to make sure such statements are presented in an ethical manner. Beyond simple discourse, it is the position of this study that BBWAA writer voting explanations are also meant to help convince others that their ballot decisions are justified.

One useful tool in analyzing the ethicality of persuasive claims is Baker and Martinson's (2001) TARES Test. This test was developed to review statements based on the principles of truth, authenticity, respect for the audience, equity and social responsibility. Though usually applied to public relations and advertising communication, additional research has shown that the principles of the test can have broader application. Freeman made the case that social movement organizations should consider using the principles of authenticity and respect for the audience to help develop a set of nuanced ethical guidelines for their communication (Freeman, 2009). Freeman's study demonstrated a flexibility in the application of TARES principles that was used in this study.

Like public relations professionals and social movement organizations, BBWAA writers attempt to persuade the public with their ballot explanations. Kenneth E. Andersen's (1978) stated ethical persuasion could unite people while still permitting

individual choice. Thus, a sportswriters' attempt to build consensus on the validity of their Hall of Fame ballot can be seen as a form of persuasion. Baker and Martinson also cited the works of Jaks and Pritchard (1994) who stated that ethical persuasion should not rely on deception or manipulation. As journalists for credible media organizations, BBWAA writers can influence public perception considerably more than the average person. Thus, the TARES Test helped provide an important ethical check on the presentation of their rhetoric to ensure there was no improper coercion.

Portions of Baker and Martinson's (2001) TARES Test were used to analyze writers' statements based on the principles of respect for the subject of persuasion, equity and social responsibility. The principles of truthfulness and authenticity were not used in this study as they were too similar to the Habermasian criteria of truth and sincerity. All the criteria for the RES portion of the TARES test were specifically applied to the nuances of this study. Analysis for the principle of respect entailed judging if any writers undermined the right of the readers to make their own decisions about Bonds and Clemens based on their own personal priorities. Any disparaging remarks made about an opposing viewpoint violated this respect for their readers.

Analysis of the principle of equity determined if enough context and explanation were given so the public could understand what they are reading. This criterion protected against what Rawls referred to as "veil of ignorance," which could give the writer an improper advantage in discussion about the issue (Rawls, 1971, p. 136) because of their superior knowledge. Examination of the principle of social responsibility looked at whether the presentation of the writers' arguments was in favor

of the public good. Analysis for this criterion determined whether there were any potential negative impacts of the writers' arguments that might be harmful to the public. It should also be noted that as journalists, each of the BBWAA members were expected to ensure their writing promoted the "free exchange of information" that was "accurate, fair, and thorough" (Editors, 2014). This basic journalistic integrity was reflected in several criteria used for this study and will be referenced at certain points during the analysis.

## **METHOD**

A random selection of BBWAA writers was chosen for analysis in this research. Using the BBWAA website listing the 2017 Hall of Fame ballots, names of writers voting for and against Bonds and Clemens were reviewed. Additional online searches of these writers were conducted to find any articles or other media in which the writers publicly stated their reasoning for supporting or not supporting both players for Hall of Fame induction. Availability of ballot explanations was a factor in determining selection for this study. In general, not all writers give explanations for their voting and this study was conducted for the 2017 Hall of Fame ballots, before the implementation of a BBWAA requirement mandating all writers to publicly release their ballots for the 2018 Hall of Fame Class. Several writers who voted for Bonds and Clemens were selected for analysis, along with several writers who did not vote for either player. While most writers gave explanations for all the players on their Hall of Fame ballots, this study only looked at arguments related to Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. Attempts were made

to pair writer arguments with conceptually-related analysis criteria to allow for best discussion. The writers' claims were organized based on the rhetorical criteria through which they were analyzed. Claims meeting the criteria were deemed "Fair," while those failing to meet a criterion were listed as "Foul."

### **TRUTH CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

Reviewing writers' claims for truth was a key step in analyzing rhetoric about the steroid accusations of Bonds and Clemens and the Hall of Fame. Claims not rooted in truth could not be deemed valid or ethical as they hindered the public's ability to obtain needed information to make their own decisions about these two players. Truthful claims relating to Bonds and Clemens were expected to be based on facts that could be verified by another source other than the writer. Writers who listed those verifying sources helped boost the credibility of their claims. Lack of available specifics about which players did or didn't use PEDs led some writers to speculate. When based on verifiable facts, speculation could be acceptable and provide useful information to the public about the issue. However, writers were expected to clarify speculative claims as opinion, not fact, to ensure the public knew the difference. Investigations, grand jury trials, and expansive amounts of news coverage about the alleged steroid connections of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens yielded a wealth of information which writers could use to verify their claims.

**Peter Abraham, *Boston Globe***

“My belief is the Hall is a museum that should reflect the history of the game.”

(Abraham, 2017)

*The Boston Globe* had several of its BBWAA members explain their ballots in a group article titled “How the Globe voted for the Baseball Hall of Fame,” (Abraham, 2017). Peter Abraham wrote the introduction of this group article. Several of Abraham’s *Boston Globe* colleagues were analyzed and will be discussed later. Abraham voted for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens on his 2017 ballot. The title of Abraham’s section of the group article was “The Hall should reflect the history of the game.” This title almost directly matched a quote within the article listed at the top of this section of the study, which expressed his claim that as a museum, the Hall of Fame should reflect reality.

According to the official Baseball Hall of Fame website, the full name for the home of the game’s legends is National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, so Abraham was correct in presenting this idea (“Find Us,” n.d.). From this standpoint, it was determined that Abraham’s claim was fair. By saying “my belief is” before his claim, Abraham made it clear that his thoughts on the need for the Hall of Fame to reflect the game’s history were based on his fact-based opinion (Abraham, 2016). Had he not said this, readers might have thought that his claim was somehow connected with BBWAA voting rules. With this view of the Hall of Fame as a museum, Abraham seemed to imply that it should reflect not only the positive aspects of baseball history, but also the negative. This concept wouldn’t be that foreign, as the Hall of Fame has for years presented exhibits addressing the exclusion of non-white ball players while celebrating the history

of the segregated Negro Leagues (Editors, 2017). In a similar way, reflection on the history of baseball's Steroids Era might provide a teachable moment for the public. However, beyond being just a museum, others like Hall of Famer Joe Morgan have argued that the Baseball Hall of Fame is a place for the league's best players to be honored for the way they played the game (Posnanski, 2017). By allowing entry to players who may have cheated, it could give the idea that wrongdoing can be rewarded.

Abraham didn't directly address whether he believed Bonds or Clemens used PEDs, but said his voting for them was the result of him evaluating their careers within the context of the time they played. Before this statement, he said he believed that the league, players, media and fans somehow cosigned on steroids in baseball. The broader implications of this argument will be discussed later in this study as other writers also presented it. However, Abraham missed an opportunity to bolster his claim by not explaining the specific ways in which various entities supposedly approved of steroids in baseball. For example, he could've cited specific evidence of team or league officials overlooking players' use of steroids, or quotes from fans or media figures indicating indifference to PED use. Steroid allegations aside, Bonds and Clemens would likely end up in the Hall of Fame if more BBWAA writers believed like Peter Abraham. He presented a valid claim that was worth the public considering when figuring out for themselves how they want to categorize Bonds and Clemens in baseball history. Their induction would run counter to the long-held ideal of purity that baseball has held for years. Players like Jeff Bagwell and Ivan Rodriguez both faced notable suspicion, yet still were inducted to the 2017 Hall of Fame class. There were no official or public

investigations into their alleged ties to PEDs. This, combined with the fact that Bonds and Clemens continue to receive a higher percentage of votes each year on the ballot may be an indication that the perception of baseball purity has changed. Overall, Abraham provided a fact-based claim that was helpful to the public when trying to make their own decision about both players.

### **Mark Zuckerman, MASN**

"I don't vote for anyone who either admitted taking PEDs, failed a league-sponsored drug test or has otherwise been reasonably proven to have taken them through reliable research and reporting" (Zuckerman, 2017).

Mark Zuckerman wrote his 2017 Hall of Fame ballot article for MASN, a Washington D.C. area TV station that broadcasts games for the Nationals and Baltimore Orioles. His article was one of the longest analyzed for this study, as he wrote at least a paragraph or more explaining why he did or didn't vote for every player on the 2017 Hall of Fame ballot. Both the names of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens remained unchecked on Zuckerman's ballot. The players fit two of the three criteria the writer listed as reasons for denying a Hall of Fame vote. Court filings revealed Bonds admitted to unknowingly taking PEDs ("BALCO Fast Facts," CNN.com). Roger Clemens was listed more than 80 times in the Mitchell Report investigation into steroids in baseball (ESPN.com, 2007). Zuckerman rightly referenced testimony against Clemens from former teammate Andy Pettitte, which stated the pitcher admitted steroid use. While the writer said this testimony was "undisputed," other articles show that Pettitte later



said he may have been mistaken about what he heard Clemens say (Martin, 2013).

Mistake aside, the factual basis for this claim, combined with the fact that he followed through with not voting for Bonds or Clemens made this a fair statement from a truth perspective. This was also a very practical criterion for dealing with players accused of steroids. Zuckerman basically said he won't vote for any player if most of the currently verifiable information about steroids in baseball pointed to their guilt.

For Bonds and Clemens, Zuckerman's viewpoint wouldn't bode well for their chances to enter the Hall of Fame. For some writers, the level of steroid suspicion these two players face will always be too great to overlook. One thing Zuckerman didn't note in his discussion about Bonds and Clemens was the league rule structure regarding steroids. It is important to remember that both played most of their careers during a time in which expectation of players to avoid steroids was clear enough, yet enforcement of that expectation was not clear and at times non-existent. Major League Baseball issued its first policy memo addressing player drug use in 1971. It did not address steroids specifically, but it did note that the league expected players "to comply with federal and state drug laws" (Kuhn, 1971). The league didn't begin regular testing for steroids until 2004 (Nightengale, 2014). Neither Bonds nor Clemens failed a league drug test and have both denied knowingly doing any wrong. Yet writers, and the public, have every right to reject or accept those denials as they see fit.

Zuckerman offered the most in-depth detail of all the articles analyzed in this study. His thorough presentation of information helped ensure the reader stayed on a similar level of understanding as him. This level of detail and presentation of fact-based

arguments helped the reader have confidence that his claims were credible and true, similar to the way Peter Abraham offered his claims. Further discussion of BBWAA writer explanations in this study will show a varying degree of depth in explanation. Zuckerman's article was an example of an ideal standard for ballot explanations as it offered a wealth of information for readers with any level of understanding to make their own decisions on the issue.

**Mike Berardino, *St. Paul Pioneer Press***

"We all know from Olympic sport experience, and I've covered three Olympics, the masking agents and the pharmacists; the cheaters are always ahead of the testers."

(Mike Berardino, quoted in *Midwest Swing*)

Mike Berardino cast his 2017 Hall of Fame ballot as a member of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. This study analyzed his discussion on a podcast called *Midwest Swing*, hosted by Brandon Warne. This format allowed Berardino to have a discussion with the radio host, which naturally resulted in more explanation and detail about decisions made on his ballot. Berardino voted for seven players, opting not to check the box next to the names of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. He said the smoking gun that shot a hole in any hope of those two getting the writer's vote was the large amount of suspicion from their court cases. He also mentioned the fact that both were among the 103 leaked names listed as testing positive for steroids during the league's survey testing in 2003. Not long after, Berardino made the claim this study analyzed, in which he implied that Bonds and Clemens were able to somehow mask their steroid use when

the league implemented official testing. Further discussion will show why this claim was deemed to be foul.

Berardino's claim about Bonds and Clemens allegedly masking their steroid use was apparently based on his previous experience covering Olympic events. He implied that it's well-known among those who've covered international games that cheaters have always been good at hiding their PED use (Warne, 2017, *Midwest Swing*). This may have been true anecdotally, yet Berardino offered no example to back this up. Even more problematic was the fact that he referred to this idea of widespread PED masking as if it were a universal truth. The average person wouldn't have the same level of understanding about alleged steroid use in the Olympics as a sportswriter who covered the global event and might be confused or misled by such a claim. It would've been more helpful for him to say his years of experience covering the Olympics led him to believe or have a strong opinion that most cheaters know how to hide from testing. Also, the Olympics to Major League Baseball comparison Berardino made seemed like stacking up apples to oranges. To better connect the dots between the two references, he could've stated how the BALCO investigation implicated Barry Bonds and Olympic gold medalist Marion Jones in connection with steroids (Editors, 2018).

It should be noted Berardino's discussion-based format was quite different than the standard written article analyzed in the rest of this study. Berardino made these comments in a stream of consciousness manner during a discussion with host Brandon Warne. This loosely-structured and less-polished format increased his susceptibility to making errors. It presented a cautionary example for all other BBWAA writers to take

steps to make more clear and thorough comments when speaking in such settings. However, it simply fell short of an acceptable standard of supporting information previously seen in the article of Peter Abraham and Mark Zuckerman. For Bonds and Clemens, poorly presented arguments like Berardino's could still sway members of the public to assume their guilt. This would only add to the well-established mountain of suspicion that presents a challenge for them to receive a balanced review of their careers during Hall of Fame consideration. One thing Berardino did note was a willingness to reconsider voting for Bonds and Clemens should more details emerge about future or current Hall of Fame inductees.

#### **Scott Miller, Bleacher Report**

“Personally, as long as the so-called "character clause" is included in election rules...I do not intend to vote for those buried in steroid guilt or under a mountain of circumstantial evidence.” (Scott Miller – Bleacher Report)

Scott Miller of Bleacher Report wrote a full-length to address the issue of steroids in baseball before he shared the explanations behind the players selected on his ballot. Among the topics discussed were his disagreement that steroid accused players should get a pass in the Hall of Fame because Bud Selig, the man who oversaw the league during the Steroid Era, had been inducted. He also said the Hall of Fame vote was an individual exercise, not “groupthink,” and shouldn't be used to push an agenda (Miller, 2017). Miller made it clear he would not vote for Bonds or Clemens, referencing the character clause and large amounts of evidence against them and other PED-linked

players. It was hard not to deem this claim as fair, given the well-documented steroid allegations of both players, and the fact that Miller didn't vote for Bonds and Clemens. Yet, greater discussion was needed about the one thing this claim lacked; specificity.

It would've been rather simple for anyone to find evidence supporting Miller's claim about Bonds and Clemens being buried under many steroid allegations. A simple online search about either player would've yielded numerous results with plenty of links lining up with this claim. However, Miller didn't offer any specific pieces of evidence like the Mitchell Report or BALCO investigation linking Bonds and Clemens to PEDs. Perhaps he thought this would be stating the obvious to average readers who would've already known about these allegations. Yet, Miller's claim was so broad that it almost assumed Bonds, Clemens and other players suspected of steroid use were already guilty of wrongdoing. In fact, Miller even used the word "guilt" to describe their situation. However, unless there was an official positive test or a complete confession around the time this article was written, the exact degree of guilt a player could've been accused of would've been debatable, not definite.

Lack of specificity in Miller's argument might have led some to assume Bonds and Clemens were clearly convicted of wrongdoing. Such claims have been an uphill battle in the quest for the two players to enter the Hall of Fame. As stated earlier, the evidence implicating Bonds and Clemens in steroid use is long and convincing. Yet for the sake of balancing truth and fairness, their steroid allegations should be mentioned alongside the fact that no one can definitively prove beyond a shadow of a doubt what either player did or didn't do. By not listing specific evidence, Miller missed a great

opportunity to bolster the credibility of his claim. His arguments were a prime example of why specificity must be an important standard that all BBWAA meet when making their claims about players from the Steroid Era.

### **Truth Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways**

The results of the four writers analyzed with the principle of truth criteria were mixed. The biggest difference between fair and foul claims was the fact that Abraham and Zuckerman provided supporting details for their claims while Berardino and Miller did not. This was important to note because the lack of specificity in the foul claims could seem misleading to the public. Their presentation of claims without fact-based support and failure to state their claims as opinion gave the impression that the statement was unequivocally true when there remained considerable debate on the topic. Both foul examples assumed Bonds and Clemens as guilty, potentially making it harder for the reader to view the issue objectively. Thus, the chances of both players receiving fair consideration in the minds of the public are reduced. Also, Miller missed an opportunity to expound on a different claim about the culpability of various entities for the Steroid Era. These examples show the importance of adherence to the truth principle.

### **RIGHTNESS CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

The rightness criteria for this study tested the authority of BBWAA writers to make certain claims when explaining their votes for Bonds and Clemens. Discussion

about some issues require participants to have a certain level of expertise and experience for their statements to be accepted as authoritative. As sports journalists with multiple years of experience, the writers in this study were already deemed authoritative and credible on baseball topics. This study saw claims made within the realm of baseball expertise as passing the rightness criteria. However, claims made seemingly beyond baseball expertise were seen as failing the rightness criteria unless there was supporting evidence cited to back them up.

**Peter Abraham, Boston Globe**

“I did not vote for Manny Ramirez, however. The Steroid Era did end to a large degree when a comprehensive drug program was put in place in 2006. He subsequently tested positive twice and you have to draw a line somewhere.” (Abraham, 2017)

This was the second claim from Peter Abraham of the *Boston Globe* analyzed in this study, and it is one that was very common among other writers who voted for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. Discussion about this claim touched on an important topic of whether BBWAA writers should evaluate the careers of some players differently based on the context of when they played. Abraham’s claim argued yes, as he clearly put Bonds and Clemens in a different category than Manny Ramirez, another steroid connected player on the 2017 Hall of Fame ballot. Examination of this claim with the rightness criteria helped determine whether Abraham properly used his authority as a Hall of Fame gatekeeper to differentiate players based on context. Further discussion in this section will show why Abraham’s claim was deemed fair.

Earlier in this study, it was established that Bonds and Clemens spent most of their careers without a comprehensive league drug testing policy and that neither ever failed an official league test. Abraham was willing to overlook the alleged steroid connections of these two players, but not the confirmed transgressions of Manny Ramirez. Ramirez entered the league in 1993 and had superior stats, including 555 home runs and a career batting average of .312 ("Manny Ramirez," MLB.com). However, he went on to fail an official league drug test twice before retiring, indicating he took a banned substance (ESPN.com news services, 2011). Abraham felt the need to draw the line by not voting for Ramirez with clear evidence of violating the league drug policy. This was a judgment call that Abraham had every right to make. It was firmly within the realm of his experience as a baseball writer, though additional citation regarding Manny Ramirez would've been helpful to the reader.

Abraham's judgment call didn't hurt the possibility of Bonds and Clemens making the Hall of Fame. In this case, no official test failures and continued plausible deniability helped them avoid non-votes. There wasn't a one-size fits all approach for Abraham to figure out his ballot decisions. In the same way that player statistics vary, so do the circumstances of their careers. Abraham had every right to differentiate Manny Ramirez from Bonds and Clemens as there were significant distinctions in their circumstances. Once more, it was important for the *Boston Globe* to communicate that distinction to the public so they can understand the difference between the players when drawing their own conclusions. Abraham used his authority as a BBWAA voter to decide on a preference that was based on facts. When shared with the public, these types of fact-



based opinions and preferences offered important insight needed for fans to make personal decisions about key issues.

**Nick Cafardo, Boston Globe**

“Through my sources over the years, I’ve come to believe that about 70 percent of players at least experimented with steroids, HGH, or other banned performance-enhancing drugs.” (Cafardo, 2016)

Nick Cafardo was among the writers featured in the *Boston Globe* group article revealing the 2017 ballots of its baseball writers. Like Abraham, he too voted for both Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. His main justification was based on a belief that about 70 percent of players during the Steroids Era used steroids or other banned performance-enhancing drugs. This surprisingly high figure was supposedly rooted in information provided by Cafardo’s sources gained over his years of covering the sport. This significant claim attempted to offer a specific percentage for the unconfirmed level of player PED use during the Steroid Era. Examination of this claim using the rightness criteria showed Cafardo was within his authority to offer such a statement.

It was appropriate and not surprising for Cafardo to gauge the prevalence of PED use in Major League Baseball. His experience covering the sport up close gave him a unique perspective which he had a journalistic responsibility to share with the public. Cafardo’s claim was apparently based on several sources, or informants, who may have had access to private information. He didn’t provide specifics about who those sources were or what information they passed along. While use of anonymous sources is

common among journalists, it hindered any attempt to verify Cafardo's claim, limiting its credibility. However, a key qualifier to the statement was his use of the word belief. Cafardo never stated this as an undeniable fact, but rather his anonymous sources led him to believe as many as 70 percent of players used PEDs during the Steroid Era. Thus, it was well within his realm of knowledge to speak from his experience and offer the equivalent of an educated guess.

If Cafardo believed nearly three out of every four players used PEDs during the Steroids Era, it would be easy for him to vote for Bonds and Clemens. Arguments have been made that such widespread steroid use would've created a level playing field for the league. This claim represented the type of insight that could be valuable in helping the public better understand the context of when Bonds and Clemens played, thus allowing them to make more informed decisions. However, Cafardo did fall short in providing specifics that would help verify his claim of 70% player use. As stated earlier, at least 5% of players tested positive for steroids during the 2003 sample testing period and it was also known that the Mitchell Report listed more than 80 players it suspected of PED use, though several players mentioned in the report deny such allegations. While Cafardo had the authority to make his claim about PED prevalence, he failed to offer supporting evidence to garner public confidence in it. Like Peter Abraham, he shared an informed opinion, yet didn't reveal what sources provided the data supporting this position.

**Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle**

“Everyone in the game, including the media, was complicit in the PEDs scandals to some degree, and the Hall of Fame appears to have come to some peace with the era.” (Slusser, 2016)

Susan Slusser cast her 2017 Hall of Fame ballot for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a publication which also had several of its writers pool their articles detailing their ballot decisions. The length of her ballot explanation totaled three sentences, most of which centered on her explanation for voting for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. Slusser said she had never previously voted for either on her ballot until that year. Her main reason for this decision was based on her claim that anyone associated with Major League Baseball, including media, was in some way responsible for the Steroids Era scandal. This study found this claim to be an important topic of discussion as assigning blame for the problem of steroids in baseball would significantly impact BBWAA member voting decisions and shape public opinion about the issue. Use of the rightness criteria helped determine that Slusser made a foul claim that went beyond her authority to verify.

Slusser made her statement in a matter-of-fact manner that would require her to be somehow omniscient and know all the motives of every person associated with baseball during the Steroids Era. It would've been impossible for her to have had such knowledge at the time she made her claim. Even if she focused her claim on just the media, the group she would arguably know the most about, she still could not know all the motives of every baseball journalist everywhere. Though it was likely she didn't intend to imply she had such knowledge, it was exactly how her words came across. It

would've also been helpful if she qualified her claim as a belief or opinion, rather than implying it was fact. Slusser also failed to offer any hint of supporting evidence to back her claim. Plus, she never stated exactly how others within baseball complied with the steroids scandal. It should be noted that the article format worked against her. Space and word count restraints likely set by editors did not allow her to fully elaborate her ideas.

Bonds and Clemens benefited from Slusser's viewpoint as it resulted in two additional Hall of Fame votes. Her claim essentially shifted some of the blame for PED use away from suspected players and onto other entities associated with the league. While this viewpoint may have been favorable for Bonds and Clemens, some might argue it let them off the hook for making decisions that generated steroid suspicion, or simply provided them with some type of excuse. Regardless, Slusser's seemingly universal claim went well beyond her realm of knowledge. Her claim was an example of how short article formats don't fit the Hall of Fame ballot explaining process. Three sentences cannot provide the depth of detail needed to properly explain the complexities of deciding how to vote, or not vote, for players from the Steroids Era. Slusser's claim analyzed in this study was broader than the ones made by Abraham and Cafardo, yet she made no attempt to explain what sources informed it.

**Ken Davidoff, *New York Post***

“For more than 60 years, Hall voters treated the “integrity, sportsmanship, character,” language as one regards a sprig of parsley on a dinner plate: Something to be ignored at best and resented at worst.” (Davidoff, 2017)

Ken Davidoff of the *New York Post* penned the most interesting title of all the articles analyzed in this study: “My ballot for the baseball Hall of Fame – a ‘f---ing museum.’” The title reflected a level of sarcasm that permeated the article. Davidoff, like other writers previously analyzed in this study, held strong to the concept of the Hall of Fame as a museum that should reflect reality, good or bad. Yet, Davidoff took this concept a step further, claiming the Hall of Fame never took the character clause seriously. This concept was the basis of his vote for Bonds and Clemens, implying that their alleged misdeeds could be overlooked. This was a significant claim, as it challenged the validity behind a key Hall of Fame voting guideline. Analysis of this claim using the rightness criteria helped define if Davidoff had the authority needed to make such a claim. As a member of the BBWAA, he would have significant insight on the voting guideline. However, this study found that Davidoff’s claim did not pass the rightness criteria.

Davidoff certainly had some perspective on how he and other BBWAA writers treated the character clause voting guideline. However, he referred to a span 60 years in which he said Hall voters ignored this standard. Citing such a long span of time would require someone to have a historic perspective on the Hall of Fame, which would likely go beyond the normal understanding of the average BBWAA writer. A sports historian

who had reviewed BBWAA voting habits would've been the best authority to make such a comment. Davidoff didn't offer any such reference to back up his claim. He also never offered any specific details on how voters like himself ignored the heart behind the character clause. Davidoff's lack of specifics hurt the credibility of his statement.

Davidoff's way of thinking was beneficial to Bonds and Clemens. Beyond each getting another vote, both players avoided the hot seat of this argument as BBWAA writers were the ones under scrutiny. There have been many opinions over the years about who was most responsible for the scandal of steroids in baseball. While examination of various baseball-connected entities led to some important discussion, it caused much of the dialogue about individual player consideration for the Hall of Fame to become centered on blame-shifting. While Davidoff placed the blame on the BBWAA, he failed to cite specific evidence or an independent authority to support his claim. The public missed out the most in this case because they didn't get to observe a properly presented argument that was worth consideration.

### **Rightness Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways**

The results for the rightness criteria were also mixed. Abraham and Cafardo clarified their opinions from fact and offered context that gave credibility to the authority of their claims. Taking these steps helped the reader have confidence in the claims of the writer. For the foul claims, both Slusser and Davidoff failed to stay in the lane of their authority with their claims. Slusser's claim was simply too broad with too little explanation or factual basis to be taken seriously. Her claim about the shared guilt

among several entities for the Steroids Era failed to give the reader any helpful and credible information to make their decision. Much the same for Ken Davidoff who didn't offer proof of how the Baseball Hall of Fame failed to take the character clause seriously. Both were reasonable claims that could've been marked fair had they simply listed supporting evidence. Effective dialogue must be based on trusted information. Without writers adhering to the rightness standard, the public cannot be sure they are receiving verified information.

### **SINCERITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

Analysis using the sincerity criteria helped determine if BBWAA writers were making genuine claims about Bonds and Clemens. In other words, did the writers appear to believe what they were saying about their voting decisions for both players? Violation of this criteria could occur in subtle ways and it was beyond the scope of this study to truly discover the intent of each writer. Thus, this study relied on the detection of contradictions in writer voting and rhetoric as a red flag for insincerity. Any contradiction between a writer's rhetoric and the way in which they voted was determined to be insincere. Also, any incongruent statements made about Bonds and Clemens within the writer's article were taken as a signal of insincerity. The burden was on each writer to carefully and clearly explain their ballots in a way that would avoid any confusion about their stance on Bonds, Clemens and the Hall of Fame. Insincerity in ballot justifications would confuse the public and prevent them from fully

understanding the decisions of BBWAA members, undermining a key transfer of knowledge useful to the formation of fan opinion on an important issue.

**Randy Miller, NJ.com**

“I'm still a no vote on Bonds and all players that I am 100 convinced were PED users.” (Miller, 2017)

Randy Miller wrote his Hall of Fame justification for NJ.com. His explanation was very thorough as he wrote paragraph-length descriptions for his decisions on each player listed in the 2017 Hall of Fame ballot. He chose not to vote for Bonds and Clemens. It was within his explanation for Bonds that Miller expressed the opinion stated above that he wouldn't vote for him, or any player whom he was convinced used steroids. While this seemed like a straightforward claim, further investigation was required to determine if there were any inconsistencies in Miller's statement. The sincerity criteria helped determine how genuine Miller appeared in making this statement. After review, it was decided that his claim was fair.

Miller offered his opinion that he was convinced of Bonds and Clemens being guilty of steroid use. It would've been helpful for him to state some of the evidence against either player to further assist readers in understand his reasoning. Yet, there was no contradiction in the way he made this claim. In the explanation of his non-vote for Barry Bonds, Miller addressed his disagreement with the notion that the league's home run leader and Clemens should be allowed in the Hall of Fame since Bud Selig was voted in by a separate committee. Miller believed making such a decision would be



lowering his standards for the Hall of Fame. He held firm to this idea when discussing Clemens, saying he remained convinced of the famed pitcher's alleged steroid ties. This consistent presentation of his main points left no confusion as to where Miller stood on Bonds and Clemens.

The Hall of Fame hopes of the leagues home run leader and most decorated pitcher would be dashed if all BBWAA members shared Miller's viewpoint. The writer gave a direct and candid perspective on why he wouldn't vote for either player. As has been stated before, more details on why Miller believed Bonds and Clemens were guilty would've added credibility to the argument and helped the public better understand the issue. Lack of contradictions made Miller's argument fair from a sincerity standpoint, but the lack of details and supporting evidence left the claim less convincing. Miller struggled in the same way as each writer analyzed using the rightness criteria when trying to provide supporting information for their main claim about Bonds and Clemens.

**Henry Schulman, *San Francisco Chronicle***

"I could not imagine a Hall of Fame that excluded a whole generation of players and from the outset have voted for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens, who were the best of their era" (Chronicle Staff, 2017).

Henry Schulman was among the *San Francisco Chronicle* sports writers included in the group who wrote joint articles explaining their Hall of Fame ballots. His full explanation was two sentences long. He focused each of those sentences on the topic of dealing with Steroids Era players like Bonds and Clemens on the ballot. Schulman said

he made the decision to vote for both players since they became eligible in 2013, supporting that decision with the quote listed above. Applying the sincerity criteria to Schulman's statement was challenging because of the brevity of his explanation. Yet, further research did help verify some of the statements he made, leading this study to deem his comments fair. Plus, Schulman addressed some key issues about Hall of Fame voting and the Steroids Era warranted further discussion.

Schulman claimed he voted for Bonds and Clemens since they first came on the ballot. According to the Baseball Hall of Fame Vote Tracker, he did indeed vote for both players every year from 2013 to 2017. This was the only real portion of the article that allowed testing for any possible contradiction. Schulman's claim lined up with his voting actions, thus passing the sincerity criteria and earning a fair rating. This relatively simple analysis matched the simplicity of the argument. To Schulman, allegations of wrongdoing by Bonds and Clemens seemed uncertain, yet the accomplishments of both players were clearly established. In choosing to vote for both players, he avoided having to deal with controversy about their allegations. Yet, Schulman did miss the opportunity to expand on the significance of the accomplishments of Bonds and Clemens.

Schulman's simple presentation touched on a larger idea that the career accolades of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens were their strongest case for Hall of Fame induction. However, to accept Schulman's point of view, one had to gloss over large amounts of circumstantial evidence linking the two with PEDs. To some other writers and fans, this raised ethical concerns and presented a violation of the character clause voting guideline. There was once talk of placing asterisks next to some of the records

belonging to Bonds and Clemens, signifying that their numbers were somehow not legitimate (Boyd, 2009). Yet no such action was taken. Schulman presented his point of view on both players and this issue in a simple and sincere way, which was important so not to confuse the public about his opinion. While he touched on larger concepts within the Bonds/Clemens debate, more detailed commentary from him about his stance could've provided more helpful insight to the public. Schulman, like Randy Miller, failed to offer the needed substance to help give fans a greater understanding about an important topic.

#### **Ken Rosenthal, FOX Sports**

"We don't know who did what and to what extent, effect that the substances had on players" (Rosenthal, 2015).

FOX Sports reporter Ken Rosenthal marked the names Bonds and Clemens on his 2017 ballot after doing it for the first time on his 2016 ballot. Rather than restating the same reasoning, he hyperlinked a line from his 2017 article to the full article explaining why he first decided to vote for both players for the 2016 Hall of Fame Class (Rosenthal, 2017). Because Bonds and Clemens were the focus of this study, a claim from his 2015 article was selected as the basis of analysis using the sincerity criteria. If Rosenthal sent inconsistent or mixed messages on this idea, it would confuse readers and undermine the basis of his support for Bonds and Clemens. Claims spreading confusion rather than clarity could never be seen as legitimate. Further discussion will show that the FOX

Sports reporter avoided contradictions, confusion, and suspicion of insincerity, safely placing his claim in fair territory.

Early in his 2015 article, Rosenthal stated how he previously had written that he was wavering about his initial votes to exclude Bonds and Clemens from his Hall of Fame vote. Some could've seen this as a contradiction to his main vote, as it might've indicated indecisiveness and the possibility of changing his mind again. However, this study found it to be more supportive of his decision to vote for Bonds and Clemens, as it showed he was previously open to doing it before. It seemed very plausible the reason he wavered was because of the uncertainty about which players used PEDs and what impact it had on the game. He then addressed the likelihood that a suspected steroid user will likely get in the Hall of Fame, if one wasn't inducted already. He referenced players like Mike Piazza and Jeff Bagwell, who both played with steroid suspicions but never failed a league test or faced a trial testing their claim of innocence. Rosenthal said he wasn't any more confident of their innocence than he was with Bonds and Clemens. This again was a strong argument supporting his claim explaining why he voted for Bonds and Clemens. Both statements discussed were examples of how Rosenthal provided clarity with his surrounding statements, which met the sincerity criteria.

Rosenthal's eventual conversion to a Bonds and Clemens supporter was an example of an ideal scenario for both players in their Hall of Fame bids. His logic might've helped explain the steady increase of votes Bonds and Clemens have received since being placed on the ballot. Perhaps some writers once squeamish about supporting either player changed their opinions given the uncertainty of the issue and

the possibility that other steroid-linked players may already have been voted in. Like Miller and Schulman, Rosenthal presented a clear and consistent message within his article. However, he went beyond both writers by portraying the inner struggle he faced when deciding his ballots. Rosenthal's comments on the wavering and uncertainty that followed his thought process over the years appeared genuine, which would help provide the public with confidence that he truly meant what he wrote.

**Mark Purdy, *The Mercury News***

“I am not so much voting against Bonds and Clemens and the rest of the steroid posse as I am abstaining until I get more information” (Purdy, 2017).

Mark Purdy of *The Mercury News* wrote a very short ballot explanation totaling about seven sentences. It centered largely on his opinion about Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens and other steroid accused players. Purdy decided not to vote for Bonds and Clemens on his ballot, saying he needed more information to make a proper decision. This was one of the most unique claims analyzed in this study because Purdy was the only writer to claim he wasn't making a definite decision with his ballot. It was important to review this statement through the lens of sincerity to determine if this was a genuine statement that fully aligned with Purdy's ballot decision and explanation. After this review, it was determined that his claim was not sincere.

Purdy's claim that he didn't have enough information to decide whether he believed Bonds and Clemens belonged in the Hall of Fame was difficult to fully understand. The lives and careers of both players have been under more public scrutiny

than any other player on the ballot. Once more, Purdy failed to explain exactly what other information he needed to help make his decision. Was he hoping for a confession or some other clear evidence proving the innocence or guilt of both players? A reader would never know from Purdy's statements alone. With no clear criteria for a decision, the writer seemingly could be stuck in an undecided state for a long time. Countless other BBWAA members had made definitive decisions about Bonds and Clemens using available information. Thus, it was hard to give Purdy a pass from doing the same.

Though Purdy said he didn't officially decide about Bonds or Clemens, his ballot clearly said different. A non-vote for both players was essentially two no votes for each. This inconsistency between Purdy's vote and his words made it very difficult to see his claims as genuine. He knew enough about Bonds and Clemens to not vote for them. So why not say this was his actual decision? Perhaps Purdy was too afraid of the consequences of taking a firm stand on the vote. Regardless, his decision, or lack of one, did nothing to further public discussion on the issue or provide any additional insight that would give readers more perspective. In fact, this lack of sincerity undermined the process of having legitimate discourse.

For Bonds and Clemens, Purdy's argument certainly dashed their hopes of Hall of Fame glory. To someday change Purdy's mind, there would have to be new evidence presented that could definitively prove they didn't take steroids. The likelihood of this happening before both players reach the 10-year ballot eligibility limit seem slim to none. Purdy seemed to be dodging an important responsibility by claiming he hadn't made a real decision when he in fact did. Beyond being insincere, Purdy abdicated his

role to take a firm stand on an issue as a BBWAA member and explain that choice to the public. Rather than providing clarity, his comments created confusion.

### **Sincerity Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways**

The majority of the writers analyzed using the sincerity criteria in this study did well in executing the Habermasian principle. Miller, Schulman and Rosenthal all clearly stated their opinions without making contradictory statements in other parts of their writing or in their ballot decisions. These were the best indicators for the public that writers were being authentic in justifying their votes. The vivid picture of the mental navigation Ken Rosenthal underwent when first deciding to vote for Bonds and Clemens was a great example for other writers to follow. Crafting such a narrative helps readers follow along with the writer's thinking process and it also conveys the level of seriousness by which they approach making such important decisions. This is important because the public cannot and should not seriously consider claims that seem disingenuous. Purdy's article seemed disingenuous because of the contradiction between his stated intent to not decide about Bonds and Clemens and his actual decision to not vote for either. Writers must do all they can to eliminate contradictions and confusion, which hinder the effectiveness of their persuasive claims.

### **RESPECT CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

With the use of the Respect Criteria, this study shifted to the examination of the ethicality of BBWAA claims. Respect is part of the TARES Test, which analyzes persuasive

communication. Writers were expected to respect the right and ability of readers to make their own decision about Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens based on their own priorities. Adherence to this principle would follow basic journalistic ideals of objectivity, which aims to provide the public with the information they need to make their own decisions rather than telling them what to believe. Explanation of their ballots required BBWAA writers to share their subjective opinion. To follow the respect criteria, they would need to do so without making disparaging remarks about an opposing viewpoint. Disagreement would be understandable, however using language to demean anyone because they hold onto an opposing opinion would undermine their individual choice and be unethical. Insults are generally not the best way to persuade others and doing so could deter some from participating in healthy discourse that is important for society.

**Tom Haudricourt, *Journal Sentinel***

“Selig was baseball commissioner during the “Steroid Era,” so some have argued the door to Cooperstown also should be opened to cheating players (or suspected cheats). This is a classic apples-to-oranges comparison.” (Haudricourt, 2017)

Tom Haudricourt of Milwaukee’s *Journal Sentinel* addressed a key issue in the 2017 Hall of Fame ballot debate comparing the election of former Commissioner Bud Selig with the possible enshrinement of Bonds, Clemens and other suspected steroid users. It’s the same concept presented during the analysis of Randy Miller’s comments earlier in this study. Some writers held the logic that Selig was as much to blame for the Steroids Era as PED users, thus both entities should be able to enter the Hall of Fame.



Haudricourt viewed this as an “apples to oranges” comparison, yet he voted for Bonds and Clemens (Haudricourt, 2017). Analyzing his statements about this issue using the respect criteria revealed whether Haudricourt expressed his disagreement in an ethical manner. As stated earlier, use of insults and other demeaning rhetoric could hinder the necessary of opinion healthy debate. After review, it was determined that Haudricourt’s statements were fair, showing respect for readers and others with opposing views.

Haudricourt laid out a well-crafted argument in a civil tone. He pointed out that a non-BBWAA committee selected Selig for Hall of Fame induction. Selig was blamed for not imposing stricter PED testing policies in place during his tenure, leading some to believe he ignored the issue altogether. However, Haudricourt said such thinking was a fallacy because he felt it overlooked the fact that such policies couldn’t be put in place without support from the player’s union. Even with the use of terminology like “apple to oranges” and “fallacy,” Haudricourt attacked the arguments, not those who made or agreed with them. His application of the principle of respect gave opponents additional information to consider, rather than simply dismissing their argument. Haudricourt’s civility in differences carried over when defending his votes for Bonds and Clemens. He stated how he respected the opinions of those who didn’t agree with his stance and expressed a willingness to engage them in further dialogue about the topic.

Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens directly benefited from Haudricourt’s opinion and arguments as he ended up voting for each player. He disagreed with a line of thinking that hinged the legacies of both players on the legacy of former commissioner Bud Selig. Haudricourt favored separating these entities during Hall of Fame

consideration, allowing their career accomplishments to stand alone. Basing the legacies of Bonds and Clemens on the action or inaction of another would simply be unfair. The way Haudricourt presented and defended his arguments provided an excellent model for other writers to follow. His attacking of opposing arguments rather than the people who made or believed them created a civil tone with his disagreement, leaving little room for it to be received as an insult. His openness to continue considering opposing viewpoints was also exemplary because it showed he didn't assume to possess superior knowledge in every aspect of this complicated issue. Widespread application of these principles of respect between writers and audiences would help foster healthy discourse on a contentious topic.

### **Randy Miller, NJ.com**

“These voters figure Bonds is Hall of Fame worthy if the man who didn't do anything for years to stop the steroids era will get a plaque in Cooperstown...I see their point, but I'm not lowering my standards just because a committee of 16 is putting in Selig.” (Miller, 2017)

Randy Miller was previously featured in this study when analyzing the sincerity of his claim about being convinced Bonds and Clemens were cheaters. As part of that claim, he, like Haudricourt, addressed the argument that Selig's induction justified allowing Bonds and Clemens to enter. Using the respect criteria, his comments addressing those he disagreed with were analyzed to determine if they gave the proper regard to those with differing opinions. This comparison between Selig, Bonds

and Clemens was clearly quite prevalent during the 2017 ballot year and reviewing how more than one BBWAA writer addressed it could offer further insight into how some in the organization handle opposing views. The opinions of these sports journalists shape how baseball history will be remembered and the mass communication of their words could greatly impact public perception. This study deemed Miller's comments fair as they showed respect for his opponents while explaining his view in a civil manner.

One of the key phrases in Miller's explanation that showed respect for his audience was "I see their point" (Miller, 2017). These words indicate that he saw value and merit in a different viewpoint. This was an important step in beginning healthy discourse as it showed Miller's willingness to acknowledge the viewpoints of those who disagreed with him. This step shouldn't be done under mere pretense or formality. The principle of sincerity must be applied when a speaker addresses an opposing viewpoint. Opposing comments that a speaker views as unworthy of consideration should be stated in a way that wouldn't be considered insulting. Beyond this, Miller specifically stated his disagreement with this viewpoint. He, like Haudricourt, mentioned that a separate committee voted in Selig, indicating his belief that the former commissioner's Hall of Fame induction was disconnected from the fate of Bonds and Clemens. This helped the audience better understand his opinion.

Miller's decision not to vote for Bonds or Clemens clearly hurt their chances of Hall of Fame entry. His arguments for why he wouldn't vote for them, or link their legacy with Selig, were clearly laid out in a respectful manner. Civil rebuttal and

exchange of differing ideas can help foster more discussion on a topic. The words of BBWAA writers also set the tone for how discussion on Hall of Fame voting will be carried out. Miller could've easily dismissed the concept of linking Bonds and Clemens to Selig. Instead, he took time to understand the logic behind an opposing view and offered a counterpoint that had a greater chance of being received by others because of its respectful presentation.

### **Respect Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways**

The three writers analyzed using the lens of the respect criteria upheld the principle of this standard. At no point did they ever denigrate a potential opposing viewpoint. In fact, all the writers analyzed in this entire study showed respect for the audience. This was encouraging as it showed writers weren't attacking people with differing views on Bonds and Clemens. Widespread adherence to this principle was not surprising given the journalistic training of writers. Respect is foundational to healthy societal debate because it helps promote the exchange of ideas and allows people of any persuasion to consider new information.

### **EQUITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

The analysis of statements using the equity criteria was a key part of this study. This standard requires writers to ensure they properly explained their arguments with sufficient detail and context to help readers fully understand their point. As professional sports writers, their knowledge about the game of baseball and the Steroids Era likely

went beyond the understanding of their readers. This knowledge gap could create confusion between the reader and writer, thus hindering the discourse process. One criteria component used for this specific analysis looked at whether the writer tried to provide any background information for readers to help them better understand their statements regarding Bonds, Clemens and the Hall of Fame. Some statements may require more detail than others, however it was important for writers not to assume all readers would understand each reference without the provision of some additional context. Another criteria component used in this section of the analysis reviewed if writers offered citation with the explanation of their context. This not only gave the writer's claims more credibility, but also provided a way for readers to do additional research on their own to better understand the issue.

**Nick Cafardo, *Boston Globe***

"I've gone from voting for steroid users to voting for those I believe are Hall of Famers who can't be denied...I'm not saying I haven't added and deleted a few caveats along the way" (Cafardo, 2016).

The paraphrase above from *Boston Globe* writer Nick Cafardo depicted his evolution in thinking about voting for Steroids Era players, and touched on the way he categorized different players. As discussed earlier in this study when analyzing a previous Cafardo quote, the Boston Globe writer believed that PED use in baseball was so widespread that it was virtually an even playing field. He voted for Bonds and Clemens largely because of their statistics and career accomplishments. Yet, he did not

vote for Manny Ramirez, who had great career statistics, but twice tested positive for a banned substance after the MLB instituted a comprehensive drug policy. Analyzing Cafardo's explanation for this using the equity criteria revealed whether he took helpful steps to explain his reasoning to the public. Even if writers cannot go too far in depth because of content constraints or other factors, readers should at least be able to walk away with a basic premise of their argument. It was determined that Cafardo did indeed provide sufficient context, thus his statements were ruled fair.

Cafardo made it clear why he viewed the career of Manny Ramirez differently than the careers of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. His decision not to vote for Ramirez was based on the former outfielder's "multiple offenses after testing was in place" (Cafardo, 2016). Ramirez's two failed drug tests were blatant and indisputable evidence of disregard for league policy. Cafardo clearly saw the speculation surrounding Bonds and Clemens as less obvious, and their unparalleled success led the writer to see them as the best of generation at their positions. It could have been helpful for Cafardo to cite specific sources about Ramirez, yet, his career was well-known at the time and many readers would've likely been familiar with his positive drug tests. Thus, the *Boston Globe* writer had given readers sufficient information to explain his reasoning and allow them to accept or reject it as they desired.

Bonds and Clemens each received a Hall of Fame vote from Cafardo. His view of them as great all-time players and the fact that they didn't have indisputable evidence of breaking league policy like Ramirez led to them both getting checked on his Hall of Fame ballot. Cafardo's sufficient application of the equity principle reiterated the

importance of how BBWAA writers explain their voting decisions. Had he not offered context and explained the differences he saw in the careers of Bonds and Clemens and then Manny Ramirez, the reader might have thought he was applying an unfair standard. Some readers might have felt his reasoning was unfair regardless, however, at least they were given an explanation with which they could choose to agree or disagree. Because Cafardo properly applied the equity principle, it helped readers be equipped with the information needed to engage in further discourse about the issue.

**Ken Davidoff, *New York Post***

“All should be forgiven – even those like Selig who violated the collective bargaining agreement – three times – in the interest of best presenting the game’s history” (Davidoff, 2017).

Ken Davidoff of the *New York Post* again brought the Selig issue front and center in his claim about how the Hall of Fame has viewed rule breakers over the years. Like several others in this study, Davidoff felt that Bud Selig’s Hall of Fame induction should’ve paved the way for BBWAA writers to vote for Bonds and Clemens. While other writers had previously alleged that Selig’s lack of league oversight contributed to widespread PED use, Davidoff accused the former commissioner of collusion to suppress player salaries while he owned the Milwaukee Brewers. This claim steered the conversation about Selig in a new and interesting direction, but it was important to examine whether Davidoff properly explained it for readers. First off, such a claim about Selig needed to be independently verified. Also, Davidoff had to properly explain the

connection between Selig's alleged misdeeds and the fate of Bonds and Clemens in the Hall of Fame. Analysis of Davidoff's claim and the surrounding context led this study to rule his comments as fair.

When Davidoff first mentioned Selig's alleged connection with collusion, he did so with a hyperlink to a previous article he had written about a year before, titled "The hypocrisy of sending Selig, but not PED users, to Hall of fame" (Davidoff, 2016). In it, he stated that an independent arbitrator had ruled that Selig and all the other team owners had worked together to suppress the salaries of free-agent players from 1985 to 1987. He didn't cite any specific sources to verify this, which was a missed opportunity. However, as a sports journalist for a reputable organization, the chances of him spreading false information are slim as it would likely cost him his job and leave the *New York Post* vulnerable to libel charges. Regardless, independent searching found a 1989 *Los Angeles Times* article reporting how arbitrator George Nicolau had found owners guilty of colluding during the winter of 1985-86, and was reviewing similar cases from subsequent years. Selig, who was owner of the Milwaukee Brewers and head of the Player Relations Committee at the time, was quoted in the article respecting the arbitrator's finding, saying "the current system of player compensation requires substantial change" (Newhan, 1989).

Davidoff connected Selig's history of collusion with an argument previously examined in this study comparing the Hall of Fame to a museum representing the good and bad parts of the game's history. He saw Selig's induction as a sign that the Hall of Fame could except inductees who had previously broken rules. In Davidoff's 2016



article, he quoted Selig as saying “baseball is a metaphor for life...isn’t life, even in museum form, best when presented warts and all?” (Davidoff, 2016) Beyond making a compelling argument, he gave readers plenty of information to understand his view and decide their opinions for themselves. Citation of his previous article on the same topic provided the reader more detail on his main argument about the connection between Selig, Bonds and Clemens. Like other writers analyzed in this study, some readers might disagree with the principle of Davidoff argument. However, it would be hard to argue that he failed to provide enough information for others to understand his opinion.

The Hall of Fame hopes of Bonds and Clemens would greatly benefit from more BBWAA writers taking similar views as Ken Davidoff. Reasonable suspicion of steroid use has been the main barrier for both players entering Cooperstown. Further debate should be encouraged on comparing Bonds and Clemens with Selig because several questions remain. Should the acceptance of one person’s wrongdoing justify the alleged wrongdoing of others? Did Selig’s collusion impact the game the same way as alleged PED use? Do or should the overall positive accomplishments of Bonds, Clemens and Selig outweigh any potential negative impact they’ve had on the game? The answers to these questions fall outside the scope of this study. However, discussion about the equity, or lack thereof, for consideration of different Hall of Fame candidates is important. Continued analysis of whether writer rhetoric about this topic provides readers with the information needed to draw their own conclusions.

**Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle**

“It’s a murky process to identify likely PED users, obviously, but I go by the standards of a civil trial – if there’s a “preponderance of evidence,” I won’t vote for a player.” (Ron Kroichick – Chronicle Staff, 2017)

Ron Kroichick was among the several *San Francisco Chronicle* sports writers who wrote a group article about their 2017 ballots. He addressed why he didn’t vote for Barry Bonds or Roger Clemens in the last sentence of his quote, referencing how suspicion of their PED use met the standard of preponderance of evidence in a civil trial. Introduction of this concept seemed very helpful to both Kroichick and readers as it offered a more defined standard to determine the fate of PED-linked players that the current BBWAA voting rules lack. This study sought to analyze whether Kroichick explained this standard to the public so they could fully understand how it might apply to Hall of Fame voting. Per the previously stated guidelines for the principle of equity, it was expected that some form of citation be used to help clearly define the concept of preponderance for readers. This study deemed Kroichick’s claim as foul because he failed to take the best measures to ensure readers could understand his main point.

Kroichick never actually explained the concept of preponderance of evidence for the reader. All he said was that it was the standard of a civil trial. Beyond this, the reader would’ve needed to already understand this legal concept, or they would’ve been forced to search for it on their own. Law.com defined preponderance of evidence as a standard for non-criminal cases in which the judge rules in favor of the side presenting evidence most aligned with the probable truth. When applied to the

suspicion of PED use by Bond and Clemens, the Mitchell Report and public investigations certainly point to a high probability that both were guilty and violated the character clause. However, Kroichick failed to present all the needed information for readers to make that logical connection after reading his ballot explanation. Further reading into the definition of preponderance of evidence revealed that the exact meaning of the term was “somewhat subjective,” (preponderance of the evidence, law.com). This was an important disclaimer that should have been disclosed to readers.

It can seem as if many writers and some fans use some form of the standard of preponderance of evidence when assessing the careers of Bonds and Clemens. All writers and readers must make their own conclusions based on whatever standards or principles they deem necessary. However, readers didn't get all the necessary facts allowing them to properly understand and contribute to the discourse found in Kroichick's ballot explanation. The short format used by him and several other *San Francisco Chronicle* writers left little room for more detail. Three sentences were not enough to explain Kroichick's ballot decisions, and connect technical legal terms to the concept of Hall of Fame voting. This lack of detail failed to meet the standard of creating equity of understanding between the writer and audience, which hinders discourse.

**Dan Shaughnessy, *Boston Globe***

“Manny tested positive twice and Clemens and Bonds were all over the Mitchell report while Bagwell and Rodriguez are mere victims of whispers, body changes and unexplained power surges.” (Shaughnessy, 2016)

Dan Shaughnessy was also among the several *Boston Globe* writers who pooled their articles together. Unlike the *San Francisco Chronicle's* group article referenced in this article, Shaughnessy and his colleagues were given more space to write full articles. A constant theme throughout his article was how he decided to stay on a wall, which represented resistance to voting for suspected PED users. Like several other BBWAA writers, he made differentiations between the suspicions of Bonds and Clemens compared to other players. His logic lumped the two with the same culpability of Manny Ramirez, who was caught cheating twice. The nail in the coffin for Bonds and Clemens was apparently the fact that both were all over the Mitchell Report (Shaughnessy, 2016). This study analyzed whether the presentation of this fact was sufficient explanation for readers to properly understand his reasoning. After review, it was determined that Shaughnessy's claim was foul as it failed to provide the context needed to fully help the audience understand the issue.

Shaughnessy stated a well-known fact about Bonds and Clemens and their connection to a comprehensive report linking them with steroid use. Many baseball fans interested in the Hall of Fame would likely understand a reference to the report and its significance. However, what was missing from Shaughnessy's explanation was any information about how specifically Bonds and Clemens were mentioned in the report. This would go beyond the mere mention and allow the reader to better understand the significance of appearance of a player's name in this report. As stated earlier, Clemens was mentioned more than 80 times in the filing (ESPN.com, 2007). Readers would've greatly benefitted from additional details clarifying Shaughnessy's standard of suspicion.

For writers like Shaughnessy, the suspicion surrounding any player linked to the Mitchell Report will continue to warrant an unchecked box next to their name. They have every right to take this stance and significant amounts of surrounding evidence is on their side. However, when communicating their positions publicly, it is important that BBWAA writers go beyond surface level details and provide as many specifics as possible to help the reader best understand their position. Had Shaughnessy offered any further information about the connection of Bonds and Clemens to the Mitchell Report, it would've strengthened his argument and helped the reader be convinced that he had established a reasonable standard of steroid suspicion.

#### **Equity Criteria Analysis: Key Takeaways**

Adherence to the equity principle was a struggle for the writers analyzed in this section and the entire study. Some like Nick Cafardo and Ken Davidoff provided plenty of background information needed to help the public understand the reasoning behind their ballot decision. Yet examples like Ron Kroichick's article were common among the writers analyzed in this study. He stated the connection of Bonds and Clemens to the Mitchell Report as the reason he refused to vote for either player. However, Kroichick failed to describe how the report implicated either of the players in wrongdoing. Many readers might understand the reference, yet it would've been helpful to explain how both players were accused in that report, especially since it was a key determining factor in Kroichick's decision. Equity might be the most important principle in the

dynamic between the writer and readers because the public can't consider a persuasive claim without being given the proper information to understand it.

### **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CRITERIA ANALYSIS**

The final criteria for this study reviewed whether BBWAA writers followed the ethical principle of social responsibility in their ballot explanations. Journalists are expected by trade to provide needed information to the public in a way that is beneficial, not harmful. To maintain a healthy discourse with free exchange of ideas, BBWAA writers were expected to present information in a way that wouldn't be misleading to readers. Tactics like leaving out important information to frame an issue to better align it with a preferred viewpoint would be an unethical way for writers to persuade the public. It would rob them of the opportunity to fully understand and engage in dialogue about a topic in a meaningful way. Another standard this study examined was whether writers used inflammatory rhetoric to boost their position or challenge another. Insults against or minimization of opposing views could damage a reader's psyche and perhaps cause them to withdraw from discourse on baseball and steroids.

#### ***Ann Killion, San Francisco Chronicle***

"I never vote for more than four or five players, always vote for Lee Smith and Time Raines, changed my mind on Edgar Martinez this year and still don't vote for

players with clear evidence and history of steroid use.” (Ann Killion – Chronicle Staff, 2017)

Killion’s ballot explanation won the award for being the shortest analyzed in this study as it was literally one sentence. In her explanation, she stated her preference of only voting for three or four players at most on her ballot. After listing the three players she voted for, she commented on her reluctance to vote for players with supposedly obvious connections to steroid use. While she didn’t address Bonds or Clemens directly in her explanation, her non-vote for them and the fact that both players have faced heavy suspicion of PED use make it likely that they were included in the latter end of her comment. Nothing she said was particularly insulting, demeaning, or hurtful to those with an opposing view. This study looked at whether the way she presented the issue was misleading. After review, it was determined that Killion failed to present the issue in a responsible way, and her comments were marked foul.

Killion’s comment was very short and broad. In referring to players facing steroid guilt, she never offered any definition of what is clear evidence of PED use. She could’ve referenced being listed on the Mitchell Report, failure of a league drug test, or any number of specific situations pointing to suspicion of PED use. The reader would be left to guess her standard of clear evidence. Not clarifying this standard was misleading as it could’ve led some readers to believe that suspicion automatically equaled guilt. Killion’s comments created confusion, falling short of the standard of being beneficial to the audience.

Aside from not being marked on Killion's Hall of Fame ballot, Bonds, Clemens and other players facing steroid accusations seemingly weren't given the necessary consideration in the writer's comment. Implying guilt without detailed explanation fails to give the public a full picture of the issue needed to engage in the debate and eventually come to a conclusion. She likely had more supporting evidence to back her position, but one sentence was not enough to properly present her point of view. Such short form ballot explanations do little good for the writer, reader, and the overall discussion about the issue.

**Jon Morosi, MLB.com**

"But rather than surmise who used – because an educated guess is all we have in some cases – it's most reasonable to vote for the players who truly excelled in a flawed era...Bonds, Clemens, Bagwell and Ivan Rodriguez did that." (Morosi, 2016)

Jon Morosi of MLB.com made a similar differentiation as several other writers in this study between players who failed league drug tests and those who didn't, but were still suspected of PED use. While he mentioned mounting evidence against Bonds and Clemens he also pointed to the uncertainty about which players took steroids. It was from this viewpoint that Morosi decided to vote for players who excelled above their peers during their time in the league. Morosi presented his position without resorting to inflammatory or insulting rhetoric. Thus, this study sought to answer whether he presented his position in a misleading manner. As with Ann Killion, there was an



expectation that Morosi provided a full picture of the issue for the reader. After review, it was determined that the comments of the MLB.com writer were fair.

Beyond being more thorough, the one thing Morosi did that Killion didn't was present a more balanced view of the issue surrounding Bonds, Clemens and PEDs. He acknowledged that both players faced plenty of evidence pointing to their guilt. Yet, he also made it clear that there was still a significant amount of uncertainty about which players did or didn't cheat. He presented a more realistic picture of the issue that left plenty of room for readers to decide on their own which viewpoint they would adopt about both players. An argument could be made that assuming guilt, or innocence without all the facts would be irresponsible. Morosi never said Bonds and Clemens weren't guilty. He just said he wasn't completely sure, thus, he based his vote on their career accomplishments.

Bonds and Clemens clearly benefited from Morosi's opinion. However, the writer's balanced presentation of the issue was also helpful to readers as it gave them a full picture of the issue. Ideally, it would've been nice for Morosi to specify even further which aspects he felt were clear and unclear about the suspicion facing Bonds, Clemens and other players. However, Morosi sufficiently expressed the internal debate that all BBWAA face when preparing ballots. Communicating that to the public allows them to begin to wrestle with the certainty and uncertainty of available information regarding certain players during the Steroids Era. In the end, they have to come to their own conclusions. Yet, this could only be possible if they are first given a balanced perspective on the issue.

### **Social Responsibility Analysis: Key Takeaways**

None of the writers analyzed in this study appeared to intentionally harm or mislead the public with their statements. However, Ann Killion of *San Francisco Chronicle* made a claim about her decision to exclude Bonds and Clemens from her ballot that assumed their guilt, when the topic is still up for debate. Left with her short explanation alone, the public wouldn't get a full description of the issue. This example shows how one decision to omit important information can be detrimental to readers. While it may have been a rare occurrence compared with the other claims made in this study, Killion's article should serve as a cautionary example. The journalistic standards of the writers and their publications should help prevent any intended effort to mislead the public. However, omission of key information can have a negative impact, intended or not.

### **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

The first aim of this study was to determine how BBWAA writers legitimized their 2017 Hall of Fame voting choices for Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens and explore the ethical implications of their choices. While the moral and ethical criteria for MLB Hall of Fame candidates are referenced in BBWAA character clause voting rules, subjectivity of the clause wording forced writers to set their own standards when considering Bonds, Clemens and other PED-linked players on their ballots. Many of the writers like Ron Kroichick attempted to adhere to the character clause guidelines, refusing to vote for Bonds and Clemens simply because of their suspected guilt. Others, like Ken Rosenthal,

were willing to look past the character clause and vote for both players because of the lack of conclusive evidence of their wrongdoing. Ken Davidoff disregarded the character clause altogether, saying the Hall of Fame should represent the good and bad history of baseball. Nick Cafardo was one of several writers seeing the suspicion that Bonds and Clemens faced as less egregious than other players who failed league drug tests. Some, like Henry Schulman cited the unparalleled careers of both players as reason to vote for them. Writers like Susan Slusser and Randy Miller debated linking the fate of Bonds and Clemens with former Commissioner Bud Selig's recent Hall of Fame induction.

With so many different approaches between BBWAA writers and their voting decisions, it was important for this study to examine the ethical implications behind the presentation of their ballot choices. Looking at the presentation of their claims using the Habermas legitimation criteria and portions of the ethical criteria of the TARES Test helped reveal the impact of their arguments as they led discourse on an important societal topic. As discussed in the takeaways portion of each criteria section, there were various strengths and weaknesses as well as overall tendencies the writers exhibited in their ballot justifications. For the sake of working toward solutions for identified issues, the following sections of discussion will focus on observed areas needing improvement.

### **Issue 1 – Lack of Fact-Based Arguments**

Jurgen Habermas made it clear that a society's ability to rationalize is based heavily on "the accumulation of true (empirically or analytically true) knowledge," (Habermas, 1979, p. 119). The public cannot come to any legitimate conclusions or

opinions about whether any player belongs in the Hall of Fame without proper knowledge of the facts. In several cases, writers in this study made subjective claims about Bonds, Clemens, or other suspected steroid users without reference to any factual evidence. This betrays the standard of objectivity required for ethical journalism and was particularly concerning because it left great potential for the reader to become misled and misinformed. The public can have more confidence in the information presented when it is verified by a source other than the writer.

### **Issue 2 - Not Providing Sufficient Context**

Beyond failing to provide all the needed facts and opinions of an issue, several writers analyzed in this study omitted important context needed for readers to fully understand the discussion topic. Doing so was a failure of journalistic responsibility, but it also was a missed opportunity to make their claims regarding Bonds and Clemens much stronger. cursory references to circumstantial evidence linking both players to PEDs was a common trend among some writers and it assumed that all readers understood. Arguments can be made that many baseball fans would already understand such references, but even the most knowledgeable followers of the game can use a reminder. Plus, readers not as familiar with the topic of baseball and steroids still need to be considered.

### **Issue 3 - Truthfulness & Equity**

The previously discussed issues with lack of facts and background information are logically connected with the criteria of truthfulness and the principle of equity. When making claims, several writers failed to completely state important context or evidence to verify their argument, thus failing to present the full truth. Much the same with the principle of equity. The writer can't bring the reader to the same level of understanding about the issue without presenting needed information. When this happens, the ideal communication model laid out in the theories of Jurgen Habermas breaks down. Legitimate discourse cannot occur when two entities are not on a similar level of understanding.

### **Recommendations**

Although this study reviewed a small sample of BBWAA writers, shortcomings in these key areas must be improved to help readers better understand the logic behind Hall of Fame voting. There are a few formatting changes this study suggests that the BBWAA make with the ballot to help address the observed issues. First, it might benefit readers for all voters to give a minimum of one paragraph in length detailing their decisions regarding every player on the ballot. This would allow plenty of room for writers to explain their logic. Other than a checkmark ballot, there is no standard format for BBWAA writers to present the justifications for their ballot. All writers in this study presumably followed the content requirements given by the publications for which they write, resulting in significant variation. Publications would still have the right to publish

whichever portions of a writers ballot they choose. Even providing a link to this extended version of a ballot would be helpful. Second, the BBWAA could also establish the practice of each writer including a reference section, listing at least three independent sources that would support their claims. This would standardize the writing and help create more equity of knowledge between them and the reader.

### **Future Considerations**

One area not analyzed in this study yet ripe with potential for further discovery is the observation of public reaction to ballot justifications. As mentioned earlier in this study, social media and comments sections attached to many online journalism sites allow the public to share their opinions about writer decisions in an unprecedented manner. The Habermas and partial TARES criteria used in this study aimed to measure how well writers wrote Hall of Fame ballot justifications that were in the best interest of the public. Observing feedback from readers would be the only direct way to find out what adjustments writers could make to help the public better understand their Hall of Fame voting decisions. Plus, the sheer number of available reactions to analyze would add an important layer of criticism that could be analyzed to identify trends among public reaction. Discussion about what to do with Bonds, Clemens and other steroid-linked players remains a hot-button issue. While fans do not have a say in Hall of Fame voting, it is only fitting that their voice be included in any discussion about how current BBWAA writer ballot justification could be improved.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, P., (2014, January 8) A few ways to improve Hall of Fame voting. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from [https://www.boston.com/sports/extrabases/2014/01/08/a\\_few\\_ways\\_to\\_improve\\_hall\\_of\\_fame\\_voting](https://www.boston.com/sports/extrabases/2014/01/08/a_few_ways_to_improve_hall_of_fame_voting)
- Abraham, P., (2017, January) The Hall should reflect the history of the game. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/sports/graphics/2017/01/baseball-hof/>
- Andersen, K. E., (1978) *Persuasion: Theory and practice*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston.
- Baker, S., Martinson, D., (2001) The Tares Test: Five Principles for Ethical Persuasion. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 16 (2&3) 148-175.
- Boyd, J., (2009) 756\* - Legitimacy of a Baseball Number. In R. L. Heath, E. L. Toth & D. Waymer *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II* (pp. 154-169) New York, Routledge.
- Cafardo, N., (2017, January) Votes can and should change over time. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/sports/graphics/2017/01/baseball-hof/>
- Chass, M., (2006, February 28) Schmidt An Open Book on Greenies. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/28/sports/baseball/schmidt-an-open-book-on-greenies.html>
- Chronicle staff (2017) The Chronicle's Hall of Fame voters break down their ballot. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.sfchronicle.com/giants/article/The-Chronicle-s-Hall-of-Fame-voters-break-down-10861575.php>
- Davidoff, K., (2016, December 5) The hypocrisy of sending Selig, but not PED users, to Hall of Fame. *New York Post*. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2016/12/05/the-hypocrisy-of-sending-selig-but-not-ped-users-to-hall-of-fame/>
- Davidoff, K., (2016, December 14) My ballot for the Baseball Hall of Fame – A 'f—ing museum.' *New York Post*. Retrieved from <https://nypost.com/2017/01/14/my-ballot-for-the-baseball-hall-of-fame-a-f-king-museum/>

- Editors (n.d.) About  
Retrieved from <https://bbwaa.com/about/>
- Editors (2018, April 15) BALCO Fast Facts  
Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/31/us/balco-fast-facts/>
- Editors (n.d.) Hall of Fame Election Requirements  
Retrieved from <https://bbwaa.com/hof-elec-req/>
- Editors (2017, April 13) Negro League Baseball  
Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/sports/negro-league-baseball>
- Editors (2014, September 6) SPJ Code of Ethics  
Retrieved from <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- Editors., (2012, December 5) The Steroids Era  
Retrieved from [http://www.espn.com/mlb/topics/\\_/page/the-steroids-era](http://www.espn.com/mlb/topics/_/page/the-steroids-era)
- ESPN.com news services, (2007, December 14) Mitchell report: Baseball slow to react to players' steroid use. ESPN. Retrieved from <http://www.espn.com/mlb/news/story?id=3153509>
- ESPN.com news services, (2011, April 10) Rays Manny Ramirez to retire. ESPN.  
Retrieved from <http://www.espn.com/mlb/news/story?id=6310125>
- Feldner, S., R. Meisenbach (2007) SaveDisney.com and Activist Challenges: A Habermasian Perspective on Corporate Legitimacy. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1 (4) 207-226.
- Foxsports, (2011, March 21) Lawyer: Bonds admits using steroids. Fox Sports.  
Retrieved from <http://www.foxsports.com/mlb/story/barry-bonds-perjury-trial-begins-032111>
- Freeman, C.J., (2009) A Greater Means To Social Good: Ethical Guidelines to Meet Social Movement Organization Advocacy Challenges. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24, 269-288.
- Habermas, J., (1979) *Communication and the evolution of society*. Beacon Press, Boston.
- Habermas, J. *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. (C. Lenhardt & S. Weber Nicholson, Trans.). MIT Press, Cambridge, 1990.



Habermas, J. (1984) *The theory of communicative action: Volume 1: Reason and the rationalization of Society*. Beacon Press, Boston.

Holtzman, J. (1996, January 11) Some questions raised about baseball writers, Hall of Fame. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from ebsco.com

Jaksa, J.A., Pritchard, M.S. (1994) *Communication ethics: Methods of analysis*. Belmont, CA, Wadsworth.

Kuhn, B., (1971, June 5) Memorandum from Major League Baseball Office of the Commissioner to Administrative Officials of Major League Baseball Re: Drug Education and Prevention Program. Retrieved from <http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/>

Law.com, Preponderance of Evidence  
Retrieved from <https://dictionary.law.com/Default.aspx?selected=1586>

Macur, J., (2012, June 18) Clemens Found Not Guilty of Lying About Drug Use. *New York Times* Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/sports/baseball/roger-clemens-is-found-not-guilty-in-perjury-trial.html>

Mandel, R.D., (1984) *Sport: A Cultural History*. Columbia University Press.

Martin, D., (2013, September 29) Clemens hugs Pettitte, who testifies against him. *New York Post*. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2013/09/29/rivera-happy-to-keep-final-yankee-stadium-memory/>

Miller, R., (2017, January 18) Baseball Hall of Fame 2017: Did Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Jeff Bagwell, Tim Lincecum, make my ballot? NJ.com. Retrieved from [http://www.nj.com/yankees/index.ssf/2017/01/baseball\\_hall\\_of\\_fame\\_how\\_i\\_filled\\_out\\_my\\_2017\\_bal.html](http://www.nj.com/yankees/index.ssf/2017/01/baseball_hall_of_fame_how_i_filled_out_my_2017_bal.html)

Mitchell, W., (2017, January 10) Scott Miller's 2017 Baseball Hall of Fame Ballot. Bleacher Report. Retrieved from <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2686125-seligs-cal-to-the-hall-shouldnt-bring-flood-of-new-names-to-cooperstown>

MLB.com, Roger Clemens  
<http://m.mlb.com/player/112388/roger-clemens>

MLB.com, Manny Ramirez  
<https://www.mlb.com/player/manny-ramirez-120903>

- Morosi, J. P., (2016, December 29) It's not easy filling out a HOF ballot. MLB.com. Retrieved from <http://m.mlb.com/news/article/212483252/jon-paul-morosis-2017-hall-of-fame-ballot/>
- Mrozek, D., (1983) *Sport and American Mentality, 1880 – 1910*. The University of Tennessee Press.
- Newhan, R., (1987, September 22) Arbitrator Rules Baseball Owners Guilty of Collusion *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-09-22/sports/sp-9618\\_1\\_free-agents](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-09-22/sports/sp-9618_1_free-agents)
- Nightengale, B., (2014, March 28) MLB toughens drug agreement provisions. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mlb/2014/03/28/mlb-toughens-drug-agreement-provisions/7023401/>
- Nusbaum, E., (2016, July 26) The Baseball Hall of Fame is Exclusive for fans too. sports.vice.com. Retrieved from [https://sports.vice.com/en\\_us/article/vvwb53/the-baseball-hall-of-fame-is-exclusive-for-fans-too](https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/vvwb53/the-baseball-hall-of-fame-is-exclusive-for-fans-too)
- Ponce de Leon, C. L., (2002) *Self Exposure: Human-Interest, Journalism and The Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Posnanski, J. (2017, November 21) Morgan's letter makes HOF picture cloudy for pair. MLB.com. Retrieved from <https://www.mlb.com/news/will-joe-morgan-s-letter-impact-hof-voting-c262290232>
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Roessner, L. A., (2009) Hero Crafting in *Sporting Life*, an Early Baseball Journal. *American Journalism*, 26 (2), pp. 39-65.
- Shaughnessy, D., (2016) This is not the year I stop defending the Wall. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/sports/graphics/2017/01/baseball-hof/>
- Sheinin, D., (2014, July 14) Selig Leaves a Complex Legacy. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/nationals/bud-selig-leaves-a-complex-legacy/2014/07/11/37106a52-0764-11e4-9ae6-0519a2bd5dfa\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f38076b1fc79](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/nationals/bud-selig-leaves-a-complex-legacy/2014/07/11/37106a52-0764-11e4-9ae6-0519a2bd5dfa_story.html?utm_term=.f38076b1fc79)

Story, R. (2001). The country of the young: The meaning of baseball in early American culture. In J. E. Dreifort (Ed.), *Baseball history from outside the lines: A reader*. (pp. 19–23) Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Thibodaux., R. (2019) Hall of Fame Results  
Retrieved from <https://baseball.vote/results/hof>

Voight, D. Q., (1983) *American Baseball. Vol. 1: From Gentlemen's Sport to the Commissioner System*. Pennsylvania: Penn State Press.

Zuckerman, M., (2017, January 18) My 2017 Hall of Fame Ballot (Rodriguez Among Trio Elected. MASN Sports. Retrieved from <http://www.masnsports.com/nationals-pastime/2017/01/my-2017-hall-of-fame-ballot.html>