

# Baseball Preview

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# BARRY BONDS

Baseball's Public Suspect No. 1 keeps on stonewalling — and swingin' for the fences

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He's still Barry Bonds — and we're not — though some of us are happier about that fact every day.

No surprise there, sports fans. There are no surprises left in this one, especially now that the Mitchell Committee has Suspect No. 1 in its sights and much work to do.

Everybody's stuck!

Bonds isn't emigrating from his cozy corner of the Giants' clubhouse anytime soon. Giants management isn't going to do anything that offends him. The investigation is starting. Bonds' teammates are rallying. The fans are supportive.

Stuck, stuck, stuck.

Huge no-surprise: I have my own big Bonds solution, which is not revolutionary but could be the best of many uncomfortable scenarios.

If Bonds and others are proven to have used steroids, baseball should be brave enough to vacate the ill-gotten statistics the same way the NCAA forces violating schools to retroactively vacate Final Four trips and victories and the way the International Olympic Committee nullifies tainted gold medals.

Vacate the 202 home runs Bonds hit from 1999 through 2002, and he's at 506, no threat to Hank Aaron or Babe Ruth. Don't suspend him, because there would be legal and union issues. Don't ban him. The games count. His stats don't.

Just vacate the Greg Anderson/Balco seasons, vacate the single-season home run record (vacate Mark McGwire's 70-homer season, too, if you can prove something), and explain that justice and history demand it.

That's my solution, but until Mitchell and baseball commissioner Bud Selig do their jobs and listen to me, we're all stuck, period.

Bonds has to keep stonewalling and swinging for the fences, because every other path has been cut off by the publishing of "Game of Shadows" and his own implicit guilt.

If you take away a proud and paranoid man's reputation, what does he have left? The ability to frustrate his

enemies by refusing to back down or go away. That's what.

"No, no, no," Bonds said before the game, chuckling as reporters approached seeking his first comments on the nascent investigation. "I'm going to jump off the Empire State building — flat on my face."

Which is almost exactly the same thing Bonds told the Associated Press in Scottsdale on Monday, and it wasn't that funny the first time.

These days, Bonds' only valid statements come on the field, and Thursday, in the designated hitter spot, he fled out to left field and walked in two plate appearances, four days before the Giants open the 2006 season in San Diego.

Stuck!

Giants management has to keep its head down, because it is complicit in Bonds' past actions and because it needs fans to keep believing in the product. The fans have to keep applauding, because, well, Barry might be a juiced-up historic fraud, but he's their juiced-up historic fraud.

Selig has to keep listening to the public, and now he has to keep faith that Mitchell's lawyers will offer up something clear and decisive about the steroid era.

It's a tricky issue, obviously. Bonds has the single-season home run record, which he set in 2001, when he was probably doing massive cocktails of bad chemistry.

Bonds, sitting at 708 career home runs, is about to pass Ruth and might pass Aaron as the home run king, mostly because of the extra power provided by Victor Conte Jr. and Anderson.

But how do you prove something from so long ago (with no old urine or blood tests from that era) and what do you do to the record book if you prove it?

"I don't know why that is such an important thing," Omar Vizquel said, when asked if Bonds' 1999-2002 achievements might be tainted. "The past is the past."

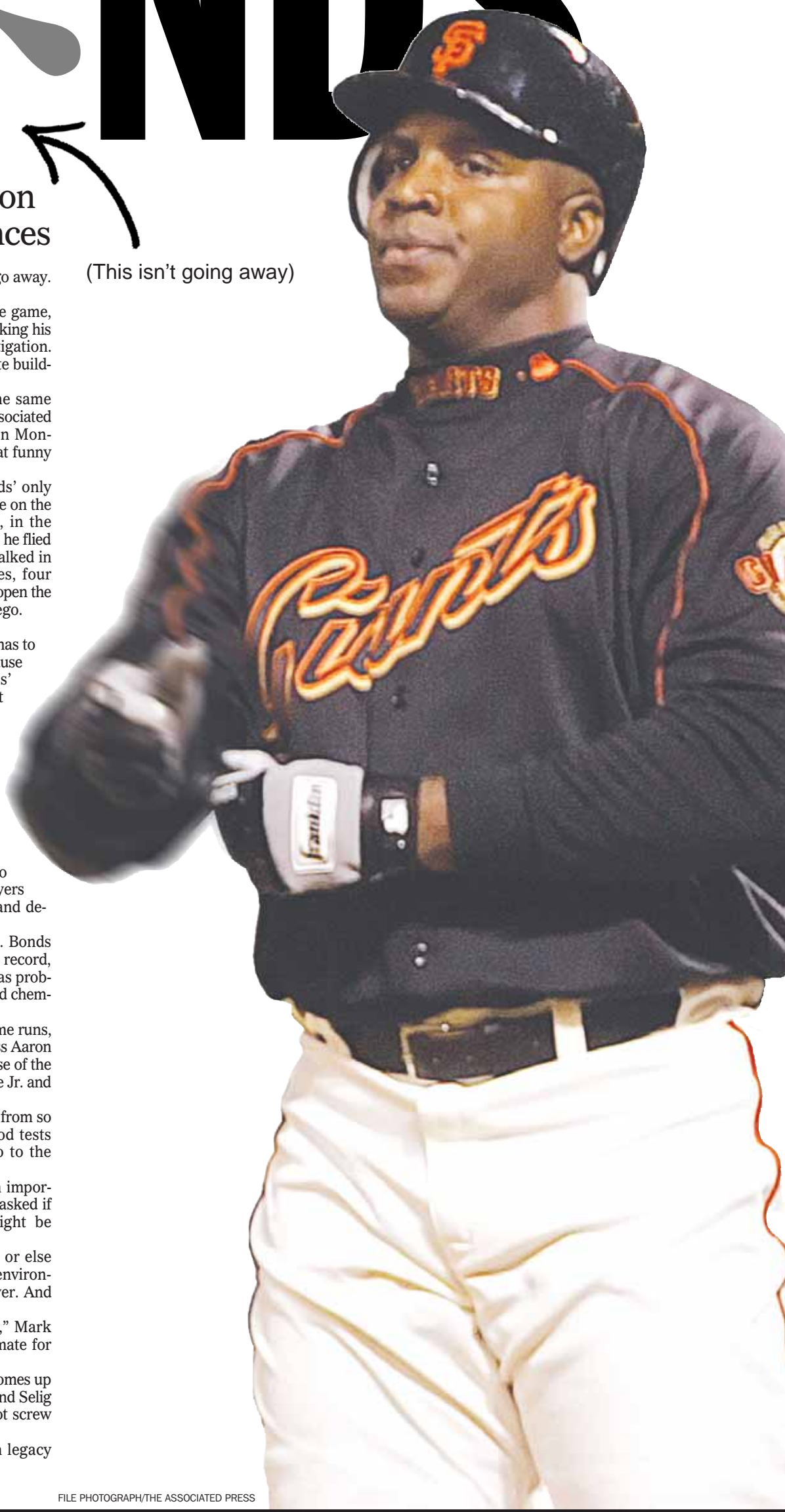
Bonds' teammates are stuck, too, or else they risk messing up the clubhouse environment and angering the franchise player. And the franchise.

"The most important thing for us," Mark Sweeney said, "is to be a good teammate for Barry, be on his side."

See? Stuck. At least until Mitchell comes up with something — which he better — and Selig does something — which he better not screw up.

If Selig does screw it up, his own legacy should be vacated.

(This isn't going away)



FILE PHOTOGRAPH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

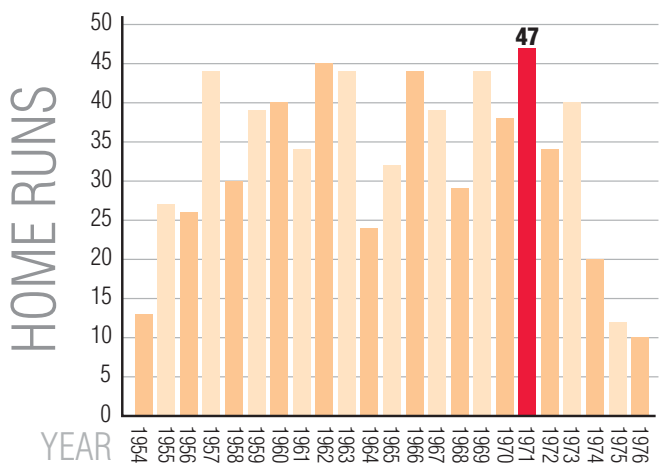
## LONG-BALL HISTORY

A year-by-year look at the home runs hit during the careers of Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth and Barry Bonds:



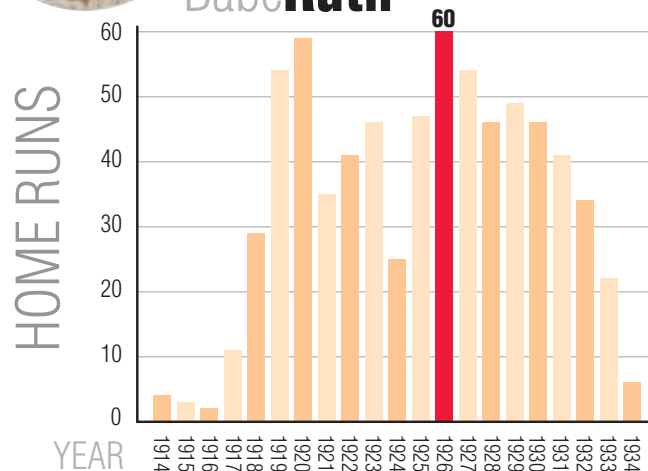
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Hank Aaron



714

Babe Ruth



708

Barry Bonds

