

Buying Bonds



By Rabbi Moshe Yoseph Koniuchowsky

Boy oh boy Rabbi. You must really be bored nowadays, not to mention having plenty of time on your hands, if you have nothing else to write about except baseball's new home run king Barry Bonds. What does that have to do with the Bible?

Well in life sometimes we can learn lessons from other forms of human endeavor other than Scripture, even though Scriptural principles should apply to all areas of life. Like many of you, I am a baseball fan and have been since childhood. There are ebbs and flows, or peaks and valleys of my interest, but all in all, I have followed the game in one form, or another for the past 40 + years!

It is therefore incumbent upon me to make a few comments on the new home run king Barry Bonds, as he has passed the legendary Hank Aaron's all time mark of 755 major league homeruns. Never mind that Japan's Saraharu Oh (is that spelled right?) and Josh Gibson (the ONLY man to ever hit a FAIR ball out of Yankee Stadium) of the famed Negro Leagues (the greatest major league ever; according to reports, Jackie Robinson who came from the Negro Leagues, was not even near the best of that league) have well over 800 home runs.

When it comes to the major league baseball 755 was the magic number for over thirty years, which was powerfully eclipsed by Barry Bonds on August 7, 2007. American sports most hallowed and revered record, that of career home runs, has been approached, breached and then broken.

I first saw Barry Bonds play as a thin 19, or 20 year-old something, as a Pittsburgh Pirate in the early 1980s' and knew he was a specially gifted athlete. As the years passed by, it was apparent that not only was he better than his all star father Bobby Bonds, but that he was the BEST all around player in the game since perhaps the "Sey Hey kid," Willie Mays. He could do it all.

He would annually hit 30-35 homers, steal close to 50 bases, throw runners out from the outfield and he excelled in all 5 fundamental areas of the game. That was established. Barry Bonds was a sure first ballot hall of famer, accumulating NINE most valuable player awards and multiple gold gloves for defensive excellence in the outfields that he patrolled for both the Pittsburgh Pirates and the San Francisco Giants. If he had played most of his career for the New York Yankees, they would have, or might have renamed Wall Street after him, not to mention having his own candy bar.

Through the years he established himself and was considered "the" elite player of our generation. This truth was not even questioned, or debated amongst the game's connoisseurs. I personally saw Mantle, Mays, Frank Robinson and many others, and there is no question that in my view, Barry Bonds was the best I ever saw. This was BEFORE most of the American public had ever heard the word "steroid."

Then as the clock turned to the mid 1990s from about 1994 to the present, the paradigm in major league baseball began to change. The game's greatest players and athletes began to consume anabolic steroids like candy to enhance their performance. This was illegal and yet many of the games players from superstars to average bums were on the soup; juiced up. Men that looked like your 20 year old son, thin and handsome, almost overnight began turning into Hulk like superhuman giants, modern day Nephilim, bulking up to almost 3, or 4 times their actual size.

For years, (15 or more) major league baseball did not enforce the ban on steroids, or performance enhancing steroids and did nothing to curb, or arrest the game's growing problem. They chose to look the other way. The owners and the players union both helped create an industrywide dilemma and pandemic; they would eventually try and pin their collective culpability on just one player; Barry Bonds. More on that later!

According to published reports from journalists, clubhouse trainers and other major league whistle blowers, the game became infested with steroid use, with estimates as high as 70 to 90 percent of all major league baseball players on these performance enhancing drugs. And yet, as the home run totals soared, as the RBI and power totals skyrocketed, as men showed up at the ballpark looking like bodybuilders, no one did anything; not one owner stepped forward to address, or begin to curtail this growing problem, because the turnstiles and the box office receipts were climbing and had never been higher. Juiced up players led to "juiced up" gate receipts! Bravo said the owners and players!

Managements' fear to confront the strongest labor union in America, the professional baseball players union, was another factor in baseball's passive position. Several work stoppages had almost destroyed the owner's franchise monopoly.

This background brings us up to date.

Mark McGuire, Sammy Sosa, Jose Canseco, Jason Giambi, Rafael Palmeiro (who lied under congressional oath, as he was CAUGHT later on and has yet to go to jail) and multiple other record breakers, have either admitted to prolonged steroid use, or have pleaded the 5th amendment right to remain silent, so that they would not incriminate themselves.

But anyone looking at "before and after" photos can see that they injected themselves to supersize status. Now mind you that these steroids were not just being used by home run hitters like those mentioned above. Even average shortstops and pitchers and the least talented players were playing America's pastime "all juiced up." The steroid scourge became so pronounced that congressional investigations and federal threats from the US government, became a beacon call to "clean up" the game, or people would begin to go to jail and baseball's federal exemption from corporate anti-trust regulations would be revoked.

To show the seriousness of the steroid usage in baseball, former Senator George Mitchell, who helped negotiate the peace deal between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, has been retained on behalf of congress and MLB to investigate and then expose the widespread cheating in major league baseball. The time period from the mid 1990s' to the present, has become known as the "steroid era" in baseball.

All records achieved during this time period have been placed under a dark cloud of suspicion, along with almost every player to wear a major league uniform. Simply put, if a player remained clean and did not use performance enhancing drugs, they were at such a severe disadvantage on an unlevel playing field, that they

basically couldn't compete against their opponents. Their jobs would then be in jeopardy to someone willing to be "juiced up" for the preservation of his career.

It is with this understanding as a backdrop, that we now address the current Barry Bonds dilemma and ongoing controversy. Based on Barry Bond's early career and the currently known facts, we can make the following observations:

1. Bonds had a Hall of Fame career going early on before steroids were a problem.
2. He was the best in the game before he allegedly began using steroids in the late 90s or around 2000-2001.
3. For about 14 years there was NO ALLEGATION that Bonds used performance enhancing drugs.
4. Steroids can make a great player more potent, but it is not a magic pill that allows a bum, to turn into Babe Ruth. The talent must be present first in order to be enhanced. We are speaking here of enhancement, not of "Yah given" talent, which only can come from the Creator.
5. According to former major league players and other key figures in the game, 80% of players were juiced up during the "steroid era" in baseball. That means almost ALL of Bonds competitors were "using." Moreover, it means that all, or most of the pitchers that were trying to get him out, were using themselves. In order to maintain a level playing field and in order to remain competitive perhaps he did use steroids.
6. If he did use steroids, then he along with 800-1,000 players of that era should ALL be disciplined and either exposed and, or have their accomplishments and, or records thrown out and discounted. It is blatantly unfair to pick on one player, while not exposing other name players and pitchers, by making Bonds the "poster boy" for the games sad yet comical "pooper scooper" cleanup efforts, after the fact. Meaning, that while the game was being knowingly tainted for 20 years, the owners and players did nothing, as the box office revenues hit new highs and more and more "tomato cans" were hitting 20-25 homers, when without juice, they couldn't hit the proverbial "right side of a barn." So the owners and players in collusion ignored their "in house" scourge. Now in retrospect, after the game has been tarnished and its reputation and integrity destroyed, they all want to single out just one player, and make him the "whipping boy" for the entire steroid era. Either all data of all players has to be suspect, or no one should be suspect.
7. If Major League Baseball is going to put an asterisk, or a disclaimer next to Barry Bonds historic achievement, then according to justice and equity, they must discount, or disclaim the entire "steroid era" with ALL its practitioners from the early 1990s to the present. To single out one man who has notoriety and name recognition is nothing but a high tech lynching. Why is the persecution and endless hounding of Barry Bonds a high tech lynching? Because he is a black man in America, who has a private side to him (good or bad), and doesn't like the media. Matter of fact, in his career he has ignored them and refused to talk to them for many years. Since the media controls what gets reported and how things get reported, this is their time for retribution. The owners feed the media their "stop Bonds" frenzy, as both the media and the owners have an anti Bonds bias for different reasons. Notice how they report the alleged steroid abuse of McGuire (white), Sosa (Hispanic) Palmero (Hispanic) Alex Rodriguez (Hispanic) with kid gloves, compared to the venom and nefarious hatred they use as they relentlessly hound Barry Bonds.

8. The fact is clear. Bonds did not need performance enhancing drugs, to be the game's greatest all around player in his era. He already was!
9. Bonds has never failed a drug test! At any time. Anywhere! Others have! What happened to the "presumption of innocence" in America, guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution? Are baseball and their crony hierarchy greater than the Constitution by which we are governed? In our Constitution, not only is a man, or woman innocent until and if proven guilty, but he, or she has the right to a trial by a JURY of his, or her peers. While Bonds has testified to a federal grand jury that assembles to investigate facts, not to try those facts, he has not had the right to a jury trial. If all the facts are supposedly out there, why has Major League Baseball's alleged solid case against Bonds never gone to a speedy trial? If the facts are so clear, why is it now over 5 years and no trial by jury? Every American citizen has a right to a jury trial; not a plea deal, or conviction by the media.
10. Rafael Palmero (Hispanic), Jason Giambi (white) Mark McGuire (white) have been caught and so has Sammy Sosa and so have at least 80 other lesser known players. Mostly white, or Hispanic players. Why weren't they crucified upside down daily and made into poster boys after the fact and damage had been done?
11. It is clearer still, that the "baseball commissioner of the owners" Bud Selig, the long time owner of the Milwaukee Brewers, has gone along with this high tech lynching of a black man in America, without evidence, or trial by jury. (It reminds me of what America did to Justice Clarence Thomas at his senate confirmation hearings, for the US Supreme Court.) Bud Selig has use the "court of public opinion" fueled by an anti Bonds media, to solidify and reaffirm his respect for his good friend Hank Aaron, a former Milwaukee Brewer. Bud Selig has played politics with Bond's great accomplishment, by showing up in person to witness the record tying homer, but not the record breaking homer. His behavior is despicable and inexcusable. The man (Bonds) has yet to be convicted of anything in AMERICA! Bud Selig remains as he always has been a disgrace to the game and the office of commissioner, an office which he first disbanded upon taking its reign.
12. And let me add that Hank Aaron who is constantly proclaimed to be a gentlemen's gentleman (which he basically is), has also made some very unkind remarks about Bonds and in the end merely sent in a "video of congratulations," instead of being there in person when Bonds broke the record and hit home run number 756. Hank Aaron should know better and have had far more empathy, especially in light of the racial hatred and animosity he had to endure, not to mention the real death threats in 1974 as he pursued Babe Ruth's record of 714. He should have been more careful about assuming Bond's guilt, in light of the hell he endured some 33 years ago as a black man of integrity. Unlike Hank Aaron, Barry Bonds said that when and if someone else breaks his career home run record, he will be in the front row, in attendance, cheering that individual on.

In conclusion, we are left with this sad and ongoing controversy that will not end anytime soon. We are left with the despicable reality that the owners, the media and the gullible general public have all but convicted Barry Bonds in the "court of public opinion," but never in a legitimate court of law. And the funny thing is that he denies steroid usage and I partially believe him. Here's what I do believe happened.

I do believe he hired a professional personal trainer to design a full program to keep him fit and in shape. Within that program, his personal trainer did prescribe some steroids to keep Bonds fit and competitive, as he approached his late 30s and early 40s, which in baseball terms is considered "old." Included in this package

was a cream designed to enhance physique. And that is what Bonds told the grand jury. Not that he did not take steroids. BUT that he never KNOWINGLY took steroids, leaving his fitness regimen to his expensive, experienced and specialized personal trainer. Now compare that to the other clowns like Jose Canseco, who would have fellow teammates and ballclub trainers shoot him up with steroids in full public view of other teammates in the locker room.

So if Barry Bonds used steroids, it was part of a fitness regimen. I do believe him when he says he did not KNOWINGLY take anabolic steroids. But even if he is lying, then in order to bring Torah type justice into this equation, we have to throw out and question ALL records and ALL feats achieved during baseball's "steroid era," or let them all remain and abide unquestioned and untarnished, as steroids became necessary for those needing to compete against other pitchers, who were enhancing their own performance. Ask yourself. With hundreds of users over 20 plus years, why is Bonds alone being so venomously hunted? I know the answer. Do you?

Let his record be acknowledged, admired and celebrated, without dissention and without any cloud of suspicion, even as if the overweight white alcoholic hero of yesteryear, Babe Ruth had himself set the record of 756! Yes The Babe was an admitted drinker!

After all, this is the same game, America's very own pastime that gloried in Ty Cobb's base hit record (subsequently broken by an admitted illegal gambler Pete Rose), all the while dismissing the fact that he was an alcohol addicted racist and Klu Klux Klan leader for most of his adult life. Yet his record was never even questioned. How many times did he, or the Babe appear on the field drunk, or hung over?

Barry Bonds does have one thing that he is guilty of. Being a black man in America; never convicted in a court of law and never having failed a drug test, who is a far better player than any other white major league steroid user of his era.

Ahhhh.....And for that crime he must surely pay!

Oh well. Now it's time to watch the PGA major at Southern Hills! Go Tiger Go!