

# Steroids will give baseball a black eye? Please

C. JEMAL  
HORTON



For generations, Major League Baseball has been the most flawed and historically misleading of the professional sports.

So all of a sudden the game and its records are supposed to be ruined by recent rumors of a steroid scandal? Give me a break.

Forget about what the so-called baseball purists try to tell you about all the grand statistics we've been blessed with over the various eras of baseball. The game has been tainted for years. The records have been skewed for more than a century.

What about the Dead Ball Era, from 1900 to 1919, when the game was rumored to have been played with an almost "soft" ball in order to

limit home runs?

What about the era before 1969, when the pitcher's mound was lowered from 15 inches to 10 to give hitters a fighting chance against hurlers like Bob Gibson?

And what about all the statistical "records" established before 1947, the year Jackie Robinson (Brooklyn Dodgers) and Larry Doby (Cleveland Indians) became the first black players in the big leagues?

For any baseball purist, player, manager, owner or bat boy to imply that ALLEGED steroid use by Barry Bonds and a few other modern-day players somehow overrides a legacy of manipulating baseball's statistics is, well, sinister.

In fact, if there truly is rampant steroid use in baseball — and, as of early this week, we didn't have the numbers to support such a claim — then it merely is a part of baseball's long history of cheating.

It's pretty funny, too, that there suddenly is a small debate among baseball aficionados about whether there should be asterisks beside all the most recent home-run records.



Bonds

Hey, you will get no argument from me on that one.

But while we're at it, let's just put a big, fat asterisk beside the words Major League Baseball, overall.

You know, because of all the other mess that's gone on in baseball over the years.

Certainly you've heard of the Black Sox gambling scandal of 1919 ... THAT sapped baseball's credibility.

The fact that baseball purists still fondly hail Babe Ruth, generally regarded as a binge-drinking womanizer, as the greatest player who

ever lived ... THAT sapped baseball's credibility.

The fact that Mark McGwire was embraced after breaking Roger Maris' 37-year-old home-run record, even after admitting he used androstenedione, a banned substance in most professional sports leagues ... THAT definitely sapped baseball's credibility before this year.

At least it should have. Seriously, after so much credibility has been siphoned from the game throughout the years, how much is left today?

Yet people choose to paint Bonds in villainy because of the muscle mass he's built in his late 30s? Because Bonds' trainer recently was indicted for allegedly supplying athletes with steroids? Even though there has been nothing beyond innuendo to support the assertion Bonds has used steroids?

Wow. It's amazing how convenient scapegoats become when it comes to America's Pastime.

Let's make this clear: I'm not minimizing nor condoning the use of steroids. I'm against it, and I think

abusers should be punished. That includes Bonds, if he's guilty.

But let's also not make this Watergate — which somehow became the political scandal of all political scandals in an arena that is nothing but scandalous.

For the moment, if you look closely, the pastime is being exposed for the joke that it is.

Baseball people are trying to knee-jerk their way into convincing fans that the game will be forever tarnished if it is learned that players used steroids. There's a bunch of hand-wringing and posturing.

Meanwhile, have you noticed that, while it was learned that "5 to 7 percent" of the game's players tested positive for steroids last year,

the league is adamantly against revealing those names and punishing them publicly.

Have you noticed that the MLB Players' Union won't allow any of its players to voluntarily take drug tests and clear their names in the court of public opinion?

Look, maybe I'm nit-picking. But it seems to me that if baseball were serious about protecting the so-called integrity and history of the game, it would punish all offenders swiftly and harshly.

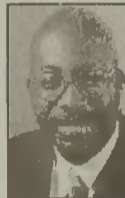
But as we know from all the looked-over-scandals the diamond has produced for generations, baseball history is mostly Revisionist History.

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## Explorer an improved product

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When Ford's Explorer got bad press for having bad tires a few years ago the industry wrote it off. No way was this thing going to continue to be the best selling SUV in the country. Heck, it isn't even best in class, so there.

Ford is so smart. The tire allegations came just before the new vehicle was to hit the street so the company held its breath and waited.

Breathe, Ford breathe. The Explorer has not loosened its grip on No. 1. The revisions have been well accepted.

No, this still may not be the best in class but that all depends on what you want the vehicle to do. As a replacement for a mini van, it's fine. As a truck, it's fine

because who actually uses a \$40,000 truck as a truck?

The Explorer's new face is about a year old now. It still looks fresh because it's basically the same face on the new F-150. The exterior now looks more like the bigger Expedition.

The interior gets the best makeover. Ford uses high quality materials and gives them useable shapes. The metal accents and textured plastics work very well. The dash is done nicely with big gauges that are easy to read.

The rest of the interior is as well appointed. The seats are comfortable but adults will find the third row of seats a tight fit. But that's what the market calls for — the ability to hold seven people despite the vehicles size.

The Explorer's ride is very good thanks to four-wheel independent suspension. The vehicle doesn't bounce around as much and it handles all types of road surfaces with aplomb. My test vehicle

was all wheel drive so handling was good also. This isn't the kind of vehicle you can drive like a sports car — no SUV should be driven as such — but it felt sure-footed.

If there is a big gripe, it's the engine. It's a 4.6-liter V8 with lots of torque. But all-wheel-drive, seven seats and lots of luxury stuff adds the pounds and this version of the Explorer feels a bit sluggish on takeoff. Once rolling, the vehicle zips along with authority.

There's not a lot to dislike about the Explorer, much more to like in fact. You will see yourself coming and going because Ford sells a ton of these. That aside, the Explorer is one of the better trucks on the road. At \$42,980, it's also expensive. That does include about every available option, including a rear DVD entertainment system. Still 42 large will buy a lot of things. The Explorer Limited AWD would be a good investment.

## Sheffield to return this week

By Ronald Blum  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA, Fla. — Gary Sheffield can play with a torn ligament in his right thumb and will be back in the New York Yankees' lineup for spring training games later this week.

The outfielder, who reinjured the thumb last weekend, was examined Tuesday in New York by hand specialist Dr. Melvin Rosenwasser.

"Gary Sheffield obviously is one tough cookie," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said. "He played through it before without a problem, apparently."

Sheffield, who was to return to Tampa on Tuesday, originally hurt the thumb last July while playing for the Atlanta Braves, but he never had an MRI exam and the torn ligament went undetected. He hit .327 after the injury with 17 homers and 62 RBIs in 69 games.

He aggravated the injury Saturday when trying to get to a fly ball by Toronto's Orlando Hudson that landed for a triple. The Yankees initially thought it was just a bruise, but the team worried after an MRI exam and X-ray revealed the tear.

"We're not out of the woods on this, don't get me wrong," Cashman said. "But today's news was certainly more encouraging, after the hand specialist in New York saw him, than

yesterday's news."

Sheffield was at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center at 6:30 a.m. for the exam. An operation to repair a torn thumb ligament typically requires two to three months of recovery time.

"Based on the hand specialist's evaluation today, all the information provided — MRIs, X-rays, Gary's history, an onsite evaluation of his hand — the recommendation right now was that surgery wasn't actually necessary, but it still remains an option," Cashman said. "If we feel it's not working, if Gary feels it isn't working, then obviously he'll have to have the surgery."

But, Cashman added, "Most likely, he'll be fine."

Last year, shortstop Derek Jeter tore a ligament in his left thumb during the AL championship series opener against Boston. He kept on playing, taking numbing medication for the remainder of the Red Sox series, and the thumb healed on its own. Rosenwasser examined Jeter in November.

"Some guys say operate, other guys say rehabilitate. I stayed with the rehabilitate guy," Jeter said.

Sheffield is among nine Yankees 35 or older — and that doesn't include pitcher Orlando Hernandez, who reached a preliminary agreement on a contract last weekend and took a physical Monday.

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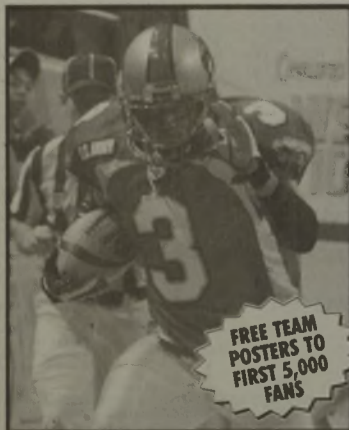
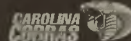
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