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Aaron's vote: Bonds is champ **Asterisks won't work, Braves great says**



By TOM HAUDRICOURT
thaudricourt@journalsentinel.com

When introduced at the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in Cooperstown, N.Y., a couple of weeks ago, Hank Aaron was announced as “the people’s home run champ.”

The obvious implication was that many people believe Barry Bonds used performance-enhancing drugs to eclipse Aaron as baseball’s home run champ. While flattered by that characterization, Aaron said Thursday he wasn’t ready to say Bonds should abdicate the throne.

“Let’s face it. You look at the stats and Barry Bonds is on top,” said Aaron, in town to be honored at the Fellowship Open. “He got more home runs than I got and he legitimately should be the home run champ.”

“I’m not going to hit another home run. I’m not going to steal another base. I’m not going to get another base hit. My career is over with and done with, and that’s the end of it. I’m glad to say it was a great career. I know I’ve never taken anything.”

As for Bonds’ upcoming perjury trial for allegedly lying to a grand jury about taking performance-enhancing drugs, Aaron said, “I’m not the law. They might say he was on steroids. I don’t know that. It hasn’t been proven that he was. I think most people want to believe that (he did use steroids).”

Aaron raised eyebrows in Cooperstown by saying that asterisks should be put by the names of record holders if they were linked conclusively to steroid use. He backed off that stance

somewhat during his informal media session at Quarles & Brady's downtown office.

"How are you going to say it?" said Aaron. " 'This guy had 500 home runs, but 400 came because he took steroids.' I don't know how you can prove that.

"The only person who can prove that is God. And I don't think anybody on this earth is God."

As he goes around and talks to youngsters about pursuing their dreams, be it playing baseball or becoming a doctor, Aaron said he does caution against taking illegal drugs.

"The first thing I tell kids, no matter what they want to do, is there's absolutely no shortcuts in life," said Aaron.

Aaron did stand by previous comments that he thought Pete Rose's lifetime ban for gambling should be lifted so he can be voted into the Hall of Fame.

"That's only my thought," he said. "I think after so many years that he's paid his dues. I know it's a serious thing that Pete Rose did, but he needs to enjoy himself a little bit before something happens to him."

Aaron is being honored by the Fellowship Open as the recipient of the 2009 "Legends Award" for his contributions on behalf of children in need through his Chasing the Dream Foundation. He will be presented that award Friday by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig at the organization's annual charity golf outing at Silver Spring Country Club.

The Fellowship Open promotes diversity and youth organizations in Milwaukee and has contributed more than \$400,000 during its first eight years. This year's four local recipients are The African American Women's Fund, The Lighthouse Youth Center, The Next Door Foundation and New Beginnings Are Possible.

John Daniels, chairman of the Fellowship Open as well as Quarles & Brady, called Aaron "a legend by all measures" and commended his dedication to helping underprivileged youth. Aaron and his wife, Billye, founded the Chasing the Dream Foundation.

"That's what it's all about, helping youngsters," said Aaron. "I chased my dream many years ago as a little boy in Mobile, Ala."

Before the session was over, Aaron saw living proof of a life he impacted. Don Roman, an attorney from Atlanta, announced that his mother used to run a café in Memphis, Lou's Nest, frequented by Aaron and others when Aaron played in the Negro Leagues before signing with the Milwaukee Braves.

Roman told Aaron that he was influenced to pursue his dream of going to Harvard Law School and wanted to publicly thank him for being an inspiration.

"That makes you feel good when you hear something like that," said Aaron, truly touched by that unexpected tribute.

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