

December 4, 2007
On Baseball

Omitting Miller Not Surprising, but Still Embarrassing

By [MURRAY CHASS](#)

The National Baseball Hall of Fame has become a national joke. Its latest electoral contrivance elected three former executives to the Hall yesterday, none named Marvin Miller. Making the committee's decision even worse, one of the three is named Bowie Kuhn.

For any committee of 12 supposedly knowledgeable baseball people to elect Kuhn, Barney Dreyfuss and Walter O'Malley and not Miller defies reasonable and logical explanation.

Of the three men elected by this newfangled panel, O'Malley deserves the honor because by moving his Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles 50 years ago, a move for which he is still reviled in Brooklyn, he opened the entire country to baseball. The new geography made a significant impact on Major League Baseball.

Few men, if any, however, made as significant an impact as Miller on Major League Baseball. You don't have to like what he did to recognize that impact. The game today is what it is in great part because of what Miller did as executive director of the players union from 1966 through 1983.

That only 3 of the 12 voters on the new executives committee acknowledged his contribution, and voted for him, is a sad commentary on the committee members and the Hall's board of directors, which concocted the committee.

The committee was weighted heavily in favor of management candidates. Seven of the 12 members were or are management figures, owners and executives. If ever a system was created for the failure of one man, this was it.

"They are not a jury of my peers," Miller observed last week, "but a jury of my antagonists."

This would seem to be payback by people who should know better. Miller wrecked the owners' cushy setup as lords and masters of the players and they would show him. I didn't think Miller would get the

nine votes necessary for election, but I thought he could come close. I could never have imagined that only three members would vote for him. As a member of the writers' wing of the Hall of Fame but a nonvoter because The New York Times doesn't allow its employees to vote, I am embarrassed for the Hall and everyone connected to it. Jane Forbes Clark, the chairman, and [Dale Petroskey](#), the president, should especially feel embarrassed for what has occurred.

With their impatience to have the veterans committee elect someone — it had elected no one in the three previous players elections and two elections of executives, managers and umpires — Clark, Petroskey and the Hall's board changed the voting format just when Miller appeared to be getting close.

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In the second election under the previous format, earlier this year, he received 63 percent of the vote, up from 44 percent in the 2003 voting. A similar gain in the next election would have put him in.

But just as Miller was nearing the final step, the Hall's board of directors changed the electorate, switching from a committee of more than 80 people dominated by former players in the Hall of Fame to three panels, including a 12-man executives committee heavily populated with management people.

They killed Miller's chances as easily as if they had stricken his name from the ballot.

Kuhn, meanwhile, was elected by this overwhelmingly management-oriented committee. In real life, Kuhn was no match for Miller, but the voters have tried to rewrite history.

"I can't say I was surprised," Miller said in a telephone interview yesterday after hearing the results. "It's demeaning to everyone involved but especially to the Hall."

At his age — 90 — Miller doesn't need another insult, but the Hall whacked him with one nonetheless.

Miller's course is clear. He should not allow the Hall of Fame to kick him around any more.

After years of being slighted by not being considered at all, then being rejected three times in five years, Miller can tell the Hall: "Never mind, leave me off the ballot next time. Who needs it?"

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Who, when the executives ballot comes up again in two years, needs the annoying, incessant telephone calls from reporters asking again what do you think your chances are, how do you feel about not having been elected thus far, why do you think you haven't been elected?

"The only reason I didn't do it this time," he said, in reference to requesting not to be on the ballot, "was

because I got talked out of it. People around me thought it was an unwise move to make, especially my wife. My feeling was I shouldn't be on the ballot, but I let myself be persuaded one more time."

Miller has had his chances, and he has given the Hall and its voters their chances. It's time to pronounce a pox on their house and say he doesn't want to be a member of a club that rejected him for membership three times.

The third time is supposed to be a charm. In this case, this was the third strike, and Miller should take his bat and ball and go home to a friendlier, appreciative environment.

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