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A Slugger's Story

Let's forget about the steroids for a little bit. Let's go back to a warm summer night in August 7, 2007 with the Giants facing off against the Nationals. Mike Bacsik was on the mound hoping not to be the one to give up the record setting home run. Everybody in San Francisco was ready for something huge to happen. The crowd flashed their cameras at any possible moment of action, hoping to witness history in the making.

It was the bottom of the fifth inning and Bonds stepped up to the plate for the third time that evening. He was 2-2, hitting a double and a single, scoring 2 runs. The crowd was chanting "BA-RRY! BA-RRY!" You could almost cut the tension in the air as Bonds chased Aaron's record. The first pitch flies by, ball one. Then ball two. You could tell Bacsik was trying to pitch around the veteran slugger. Finally a strike cruises by Bonds' knees. Bonds wanted it bad. The next pitch he just about swings out of his shoes trying to smash a ball over the fence but just misses it and fouls it off. Another ball goes by followed by another foul ball. The crowd is getting impatient as they cross their arms and keep cheering on the Giant. The count is full and almost everyone in the stands can feel what is coming up. At 8:51 pm Bacsik threw one right down the middle, a big mistake. Bonds throws his hips at the ball and puts all of his strength into his swing. Everyone knows what has just happened, including Bonds. He flings his hands up in a fit of victory. "A high fly ball into right-center field!" the announcer proclaims. "Back it goes...and that ball is GONE!!" The crowd goes wild and shakes the stadium with their cheers. Bonds trotted around the base path smiling, commenting later that he "felt like a champion". Cameras flash and videos are recorded as fans attempt to capture the magic in the air. Barry "[stood] alone" with 756 career home runs; a new record.

Barry Lamar Bonds is a tall, built man ready for action. His bright, white teeth contrasted against his dark brown skin make his smile glow. He usually is wearing a hat or helmet, but when he isn't, the sun shines brightly off of his bald head. When comparing Barry later in his career to earlier, you can definitely tell a difference. Before his accused steroid use, Bonds looked like a shrimp. He had skinny arms and, while he was muscular, he didn't look anything like he did later in his career. If you look at him in 1990 with the Pirates and then at him with the Giants in the 2000s, you can see that he probably slapped on about 50 pounds of muscle. His pecks were huge and you couldn't even think about fitting your hands around his huge arms. He looked like Popeye after eating a can of spinach! Even his hat size changed from 7 1/4" to 7 3/8" in 2002. His change was almost impossible *not* to notice. Whatever time period one looks at Barry, one can feel his winning attitude, witty humor, and sense of pride over his accomplishments. Bonds is considered one of the greatest (if not *the* greatest) hitter in major league baseball history. His homerun phenomenon ended at 762 home runs, an amazing feat, after an incredible career. Barry commented, "It's called talent. I just have it. I can't explain it. You either have it or you don't."

Bonds has led a controversial career, notably as a central figure in baseball's steroids scandal. In 2007, he was indicted on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice for allegedly lying to the grand jury during the government's investigation of BALCO, by testifying that he never knowingly took any illegal steroids. The trial began March 21, 2011; he was convicted later that year on the obstruction of justice charge. Earlier this year, Bonds was denied entry into baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown during his first year of eligibility on the ballot. People all talk about asterisks being put on his record because of his supposed involvement with performance-enhancing drugs. Bonds had to say something about that. "All you guys lied! All of

y'all and the story have lied. Should you have asterisks behind your name? All of you lied. All of you have said something wrong. All of you have dirt. When your closet's clean, then come clean somebody else's." He has a great point. Nobody is perfect and it was not the worst thing that somebody could have done at that time. When he started playing, steroid use was barely heard of, let alone wrong. It is supposed that Barry started to use steroids around 1991 to 2001. However, there were many other players that could have also been accused of using steroids around this time. "Bonds is simply being used as a scapegoat for something that every single player in the league has been doing regularly since 1990" said Bonds' attorney Michael Rains in a prepared statement. He went on to list 49 other major league players that could be under the same speculation of Bonds had the media chosen to do so. Among these names are some of the great. Mark McGwire was mentioned, as was Randy Johnson, Derek Jeter, Sammy Sosa, Mike Piazza, Manny Ramirez, Jason Giambi, Darin Erstad, Troy Glaus, Bobby Abreu, Alex Rodriguez, and Mariano Rivera. Every single one of these players could have been on trial for the same issue, but instead Barry Bonds was the main athlete that took almost the full brunt of the abuse. Bob Costas said it best in 2007. "Barry Bonds wasn't the only one who used. There was atmosphere in the game. The owners, the commissioners, the players association and the players themselves are all complicit in that." A lot of athletes used steroids in that time period. People didn't want to blow the whistle because either they were using themselves or they liked the results that they were getting from steroid use. It would surely be a shame if Bonds is outcast from being one of the greats for doing something that, if not approved by everybody, was certainly ignored because of the excitement that he produced.

Besides the steroid scandal, Barry Bonds had to endure many other challenges. One of these was barley getting the chance to get pitched to. In 2004 Bonds had the record for the most

walks in a single season with 232 walks. Of those 232, 120 of those were intentional. Most pitchers were afraid that Bonds would do what he did best and whack the ball out of the park on them. Even the great Greg Maddux said, “You walk Barry. Just walk him.” He is that guy that people look at and are afraid to compete against because of his reputation as a great ball player. Opposing teams, especially pitchers, know what he is capable of. They all know that if they give up a bad pitch Barry will see their mistake, take advantage of it, and show it to everyone that’s watching. He knows his job and is good at what he does. In order to overcome this challenge, Barry had to be patient and learn to live with it. While his fans booed the pitcher when they saw the catcher stand up and hold his mitt out for the intentional walk, Barry took it as a sign of respect and dealt with it. He said, “I don’t like to be walked, but I understand it when pitchers do it because they know the risk of pitching to me. I feel like they recognize my talent and are just doing their job the best way they know how.” He could have easily given up and not even step up to the plate. He knew that 90 percent of the time he would be walked, but he lived for the other 10 percent. He wanted to show people that he was determined to get the home run record. He made the most out of every pitch that was hittable and continued to increase his numbers by giving the ball a beating every time it entered in the strike zone. This outlook truly shows Bonds’ love of the game and his determination to be great.

Most people believe that Barry would not have broken the homerun record without steroids and therefore isn’t worthy of the praise he has been given. However others believe that a baseball player can’t get that far in the game without heaps of skill. When meeting with Bonds, writer Mark DeRosa commented, “He’s one of the very few players who was almost able to master hitting — him, Ted Williams, Willie Mays. Of course, they possess innate ability that is on a different level from normal humans. But in talking to players like them, you understand that

no matter how great you are you don't stay in this game on sheer talent. You have to be mentally tough. You have to think and analyze." Knowing what Bonds has done and his demeanor, one should only look at him for what he has been able to accomplish. His mental and physical determination has made him one of the most feared and respected players in the game of baseball.

Challenges are part of baseball. Bonds had more adversity than most players and was still able to accomplish great things. Bonds didn't care what others thought about him. He kept his cool and just played baseball. He's just like every other kid in America that wanted to grow up to be a professional baseball player. He didn't get to live the dream of batting in the bottom of the ninth inning of game 7 in the World Series. His team never gave him the chance. The Giants never won a World Series and was never a championship team. Bonds had to accomplish personal greatness if he was going to receive recognition for his baseball career. His home run record is a testament to his love of the game and amazing playing abilities. He kept his focus on playing the game he loved and putting out a performance that people that would remember. "I like to be against the odds. I'm not afraid to be lonely at the top. With me, it's just the satisfaction of the game. Just performance."