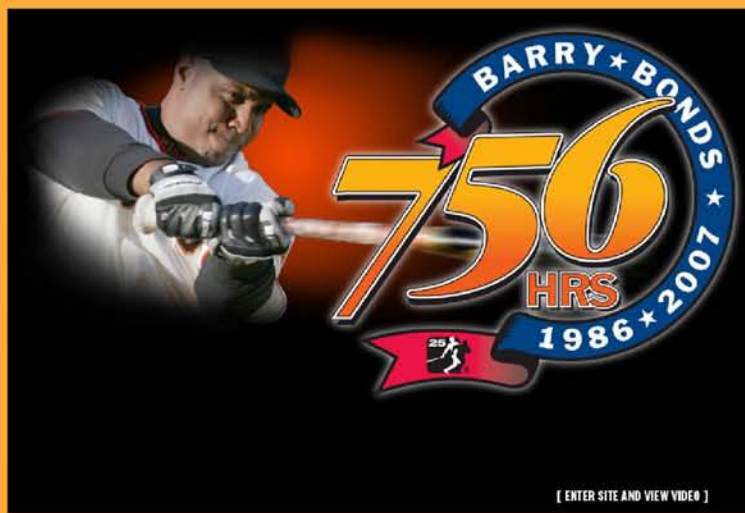




Dr. Emil M. Thomas



Hank Aaron



Rickey Henderson

756/1406

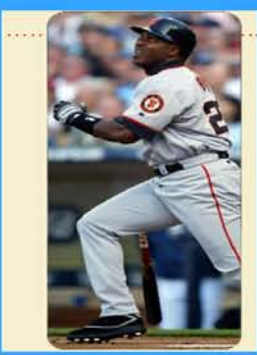
By Emil M. Thomas

Barry Bonds' launching of home run number 756 in San Francisco on Tuesday night was a momentous accomplishment. It allowed us to see the best and the worst in us. The best was depicted by Henry "Hank" Aaron being present in the cheering crowd to personally congratulate Mr. Bonds. The worst was depicted by the thousands of player-hating fans who booed when the milestone was announced in major league stadiums nationwide. We need to dismantle the charade of those who refuse to celebrate Mr. Bonds' achievement.

One of the worst characteristics of the human race is the tendency of each generation to bewail the degeneracy of the next. There is a persistent trend of persons in our species to think that their generation is the best, and that everything that comes thereafter is tainted by declension. I used to hear my elders say, "Each generation gets weaker and wiser." I took that to mean that some law of entropy was at work causing each succeeding generation to become technically better, but ethically worse. More than a little anti-Bonds animosity is generational jealousy of those who can't accept that their best has been trumped.

It's kind of crazy, isn't it? Each generation works to make it better for their children; they provide them better education, better technology, better nutrition, and hopefully a better world. But when the next generation actually does better, their elders pounce on them. Since it was harder in the "good old days," they argue that their accomplishments were purer and nobler. "When I was your age," they say, "I had to walk four miles to school barefoot in the snow." Never mind that they lived before school buses came to their neighborhoods, and they inflated the one mile they walked to four. (Plus it never snowed in Alabama, anyway.) We love to tell our youth that hip-hop is degenerate, but how much better were we when we sang along with George Clinton and said, "Somebody's been sleepin' with my funk; funk'in' round funk'in' with it till they funk it up!" (I hope my mother forgives me for quoting those lines, for she believed my generation was the worst ever for spouting such transparently decadent double-entendre.) Well, it is easier for each successive generation. Isn't it supposed to be? Our problem is that after we bequeath our children an advanced technology, we don't bequeath them a corresponding ethic to match it. Some charge that Barry Bonds accomplished his athletic feat with the aid of steroids, but there is neither admission nor proof of that contention. Indeed, those who accuse him should check themselves before they wreck themselves!





756/1406



You can't find a grocery store today without a pharmacy in it. Add to that Walgreen's, CVS, Rite-Aid and other pharmacies that dot the national landscape and you begin to see our hypocrisy. We have a proliferation of nutrition stores like GNC, and caffeine stations (Starbucks) at every turn. One can barely watch television without being bombarded with chemical solutions for everything from crash diets to restless leg syndrome to dry eyes to "male enhancement." Thank God for medicine for our ailments! I'm not even mad at someone for using drugs to quiet a restless leg or boost a vacillating virility. But when you attack athletes at the same in their game, it is hypocritical.

A young man stated to me quite glibly, "Everybody is taking something. Some of it is legal, some of it is illegal, but none of it is natural. Everybody in professional sports is taking something to enhance their performance. Even drugs to help them play while injured." I said, "So you would take drugs if you were in the pros?" He said, "Of course! If I were in the NFL do you think I would let them come at me with what they are juiced up on without having something comparable? It's the way things are." His statement was so bluntly obvious, it was shocking. Athletic competition pushes the boundaries of the possible, seeking to gain advantage at every point—and yes; everybody is taking something; even if it's a candy bar, a coffee or chewing tobacco. But what we rejected in East German Olympic athletes in the 1970's we have institutionalized in American pros in 2007. Don't get mad at me for telling the truth!

People also hate on Barry Bonds because he had all the advantages and Hank Aaron had all of the disadvantages. After all, Mr. Bonds is the son of a great major leaguer, he went to a great college, he had a great career and he became a multi-millionaire in the process. Why be mad at him for taking advantage of the advantages he was born with? It is impossible for him to live the life of a Hank Aaron, who emerged from a segregated Mobile Alabama, fought his lonely way to the top via the rough side of the mountain with nothing but sheer talent, blasting 755 home runs and eclipsing Babe Ruth. Bonds can no more return to the days of Aaron any more than Aaron could return to the days of Ruth. You can never defeat the previous generation; time simply won't let you. Omar Khayyam said it well; "The Moving Finger writes, and having writ, moves on, nor all your piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Don't twist this article to say I am advocating use of steroids or human growth hormone or other performance enhancing drugs. I'm not! What I am saying is that universal rules must be developed to define the boundary lines delineating human performance from chemical performance. Those lines should be instituted in two realms; the legal and the ethical. And we should teach every generation of children an updated honor code of sportsmanship that transcends the goals of performance or profit.

I congratulate Barry Bonds for reaching the number of 756 home runs! You are the greatest home run hitter—for now. In ten years or so, someone will eclipse you, and you will be there to congratulate him. However, there is one baseball record that will never be eclipsed—the 1,406 bases stolen by the best all-around baseball player ever; Ricky Henderson.