

2021-12-05 HOF Electee Jim Kaat Media Availability

Jon Shestakofsky

Well hello everyone and welcome to tonight's media availability with class of 2022 Hall of Fame inductee, Jim Kaat. My name is Jon Shestakofsky, Vice President of Communications and Education at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, joining you from Orlando, Florida, and earlier today, Jim was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame by the Golden Days Era Committee along with Gil Hodges, Minnie Miñoso, and Tony Oliva. These new electees from the Golden Days Era join Bud Fowler and Buck O'Neil, who were elected today by the Early Baseball Era Committee. They will be inducted into the Hall of Fame on Sunday, July 24th in Cooperstown alongside any electees that may result from the ongoing 2022 BBWAA voting process, the results of which will be announced on January 25th. And following this availability with Jim, the Hall of Fame will host a separate media availability with Tony Oliva who will be available at 7:30pm Eastern time on a separate Zoom link. Please note these sessions are going to be recorded and transcripts will become available to media within the next 48 hours, if not sooner at the Hall of Fame's website, baseballhall dot org. Jim, congratulations again and thank you for joining us on this call. So before we open for questions, would you like to share any opening thoughts?

Jim Kaat

Well, I think, you know, a lot of first timers, you know, automatic Hall of Famers, they know they're going to celebrate. My position is, I'm very humbled and grateful. I really didn't think this day would ever come. It comes as more of a gift to me, and I'm so appreciative of the guys that I played with and against that, I think rewarded durability and dependability along with dominance, which the is the Hall of Fame usually rewards rightly so. I mean, I know I'm not in the class with Sandy and Juan Marichal and Gibby and Seaver and on and on, but I'm grateful that they recognize the accomplishments over a long period of time.

Jon Shestakofsky

Wonderful, Jim. Hey, we are now ready to take questions from the call participants. So if you'd like to ask a question of Jim, please click reactions at the bottom of your screen and then the raise hand button. And the first question is going to come from Rick Hummel. Rick you can unmute yourself.

Rick Hummel

Jimmy, congratulations.

Jim Kaat

Thanks, Rick.

Rick Hummel

I just talked to your former, shortstop, Ozzie Smith there. I said, How was it playing behind Kaaty? You know, you had to stay ready. So sometimes I wasn't ready. He worked so fast. Working fast to have an effect on your career and also, what about your last four years in St. Louis, including the World Championship?

Jim Kaat

Yeah, I'm grateful again, for Johnny Sain, who kind of salvaged my career when the Twins thought it was over and I went to that quick delivery. So everybody had to be on their toes. But I remember in terms of St. Louis, I remember interviewing Mark McGwire when I was doing Yankee games, the day before he was traded, because the rumor was out. He was going to St. Louis, and I said, you're going to go to the best baseball town in America. St. Louis isn't a big city atmosphere. But it is such a great place to play. And I am so grateful that John Claiborne picked me up, I went to the Cardinals and ended up I think I have the longest period of time between World Series appearances. (19)65, and then 82. And we won it in 82. We're going to have a 40 year reunion this year. I hope I'm still around for that. So I really enjoyed my time there. Rick, thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question will come from Tyler Kepner. Tyler, you can unmute yourself.

Tyler Kepner

Hey, Jim, really happy for you. Congratulations.

Jim Kaat

Thank you, Tyler. I've always been appreciative of your support and the times we've been able to talk baseball together.

Tyler Kepner

Yeah. Well, you're a treasure. I'm very happy for you. Tell me a little bit about, before I ask about you, what about Tony Oliva? I mean to go in with him? Just the idea of going in with a teammate, after all these years must be pretty incredible. But also, what was it about Tony that made him a Hall of Fame hitter for those of us who didn't get to see him.

Jim Kaat

You know, I was kind of speculating, or fantasizing that. I told Margie my wife. I said, Man, it'd be great if I did go in to go in with Tony and I would love to have Dick Allen get one more vote as well. We're all great friends and great teammates. But I remember Tony in the instructional league in the early 60s when Del Wilber, our manager would hit him fungos fly balls and Tony literally would never get a glove on the ball. And he may which he may mentioned this in his Hall of Fame speech that even though he won batting titles, his first two years only player to ever do it. The proudest award that he ever got was a Gold Glove Award. So he turned himself into a Gold Glove fielder. And I always said Rod Carew is in the Hall of Fame and he belongs there. He's got a lot of batting titles. Harmon Killebrew is there 573 home runs, he belongs there. But if you ask catchers, like the late Bill Freehan and Andy Etchebarren, catchers in the American League in those years, the guy they really feared was Tony. So I think now

with Tony being 83 we're the same age and he's still involved with the Twins. It's really special to be able to go in with him.

Tyler Kepner

Yeah and about yourself, Jim? I mean, you look at your track record. And yeah, you know, you talk about durability, you know, other guys being dominant. But I mean, 300 innings, you know, all the innings, it's twice I think he did. There is a lot to be said for durability and accountability and all that. Did you know was that something that you actively took pride in as you were, as you were pitching that? Maybe I'm not an ace, but there is real value to longevity and consistency?

Jim Kaat

Yeah, I my goal was when they would say in spring training, you know, the logical question is, well, what's your goal? How many wins whatever. And my goal was always to start 40 games and pitch 280 innings. That seven innings a game. You know, you're going to have some where you get knocked out early. But no, I think we took a lot of pride in that. Because if we were to come in and say to a coach, wow, you know, my shoulders a little stiff today. I remember one day. I said that to Gordon Maltzberger. I think I had a long game. We didn't count pitches, but I had kind of a rough game the start before but pitched nine innings and I said I don't know, maybe I need an extra day see why, you know, we could start Lee Stange, but if he does well, I can't guarantee you that you're going to start again. So that kind of answered my question. I said, I'll never let that happen. So we took a lot of pride in going to the post every four days. Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question will come from Barry Bloom. Barry you can go ahead.

Barry Bloom

Thank you. Hey, Jimmy, congratulations. I'm very happy for you.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Barry Bloom

So I was covering your game in what was it, 1978, at San Diego stadium. You and Randy Jones. Do you remember anything about that?

Jim Kaat

I mean, we couldn't hit Randy with a boat or, I mean he just had that sinker ball. But the big story was we played the game in like an hour and 31 minutes or something. So yeah, RJ and I talked about that later. We work fast threw strikes didn't strike out a lot of people, but I certainly remember that.

Barry Bloom

Yeah, I tease Randy about it all the time. It's a it's a fun, fun memory. So as BBWAA members, I kind of think we missed the boat on you not voting you in. How much do you think your candidacy changed over time like Blyleven and who finally did get in there the end of his tenure on the ballot? When it went

basically you hold it up against starting pitching it as starting pitching as evolved or devolved in this era?

Jim Kaat

Well, I think, you know, it's pretty obvious that I had guys on the committee that I played with and against, and I think they look beyond just the numbers. And I think I've always said, when people and I won't have to answer that anymore, you know, people say oh, you should be in the Hall of Fame. Why do you think you aren't? I said, I never really was a perennial number one pitcher. You look at all the pitchers in the Hall of Fame going back to my dad went to the Hall of Fame induction of Lefty Grove in 1947. And then you had Spahnie and then along came Koufax and Juan and Gibby and then the Smoltz, Glavine, Maddux era all of those pitchers were number one pitchers. I evolved some years into a number one pitcher but I wasn't the guy that just said, you're going to start opening day for 10 years so I understood that and I think that's probably I know a lot of people in the past with the writers that said, well, it took them too long to accomplish what he did. So, if my career ended in 75, my career may have looked like a more dominant career. Because when I got to St. Louis, I felt like I could still start, and Whitey (Herzog) used me to start some games in 81, I think I got six or seven complete games, who won some games. And course, 300 was the magic number. And then he said, You know, I want you to be my lefty against lefty guy coming out of the bullpen. And we're going to get Sutter. He said, I'm gonna build my staff in the ninth inning back. And so I said, great, and of course, I'm glad I did that, because we won the World Series in 1982. And I always said, even if I never get in the Hall of Fame, that World Series ring was something that I, I really cherish took me, I went there and 65 and ran up against a pitcher named Koufax and we lost in seven, and then to get back there in 82 and win in seven was pretty rewarding.

Barry Bloom

What criteria do you think we're going to have to use now to judge starters to get into the Hall of Fame in the future? When complete games win totals, so much of what was judged for the Hall of Fame in the past, are just diminished. They're just not there anymore.

Jim Kaat

I'm glad that's your job, not mine. I think but yeah, you're right. I mean, you. I've always said, I think today's pitchers are certainly more qualified to pitch innings like we did. They're just not trained. And now, analytics. I should take that back. Charles Barkley made a good point the other night, he said, you know, they're always statistics. We have statistics. Now they call them analytics, because the owner wants to give his son in law a job. That was Charles' quote. But we always had statistics, but you know, as far as the third time through the order, and all those numbers that they have, that they're making the game more specialized, is going to hurt starting pitchers. So I don't know how you're going to judge them other than the, you know, the, the really elite like the Verlander, Scherzer, Kershaw. You have Madison Bumgardner, who had dominant years. Those days are gone because I think, you know, Johnny Sain mentioned to me in the 60s, he said the day is coming, when a team can't find five starters, they're going to use three pitchers to three pitch three innings. That's it, really, because we had four starters. And then he said the day is coming when a pitcher that can get 1, 2, 3 just get three outs in an inning. No, that can't be worth it. Hey, well, here's Johnny in the 60s already predicting that. So

that's the way the game is going. And I think it's going to make your job a lot more difficult to try to determine which starting pitchers are Hall of Fame worthy.

Barry Bloom

Well, thank you and I look forward to seeing you in Cooperstown.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up, Phil Miller. Go right ahead unmute yourself.

Phil Miller

Jim, congratulations. So happy for you. And you, I hope in 1965 when you faced Koufax three times, you were thinking this is a matchup of two Hall of Fame starters at the time.

Jim Kaat

No, I didn't really think that then Phil, I'll tell you I remember. You know, I never saw Sandy pitch in person because the only game on TV was Game of the Week. Pee Wee and (Dizzy Dean) and when they were playing, we were playing. So now there I am warming up the bullpen next to Koufax and the balls coming out of his hand. It's a cold gray day. And you guys play in this weather? That's uh, yeah, we're kind of used to it. But after we went through the batting order, the first time I think we're each walked a man. We didn't give up any hits. And I sat down next to Johnny Sain. I said my pitching coach, I said, John, if I give up a run this game's over. Nobody's gonna hit this guy. And we were lucky. We scratched out two runs. And then actually Drysdale pinch hit for Sandy in game two. And then he shut us out game five shut us out game seven on two days rest. So I certainly didn't envision me being I'll have a back room in the Hall of Fame and Sandy is up front because he was just the best of that era with no disrespect for Gibby or Seaver, Marichal but Sandy winning all those games for a team that didn't score a lot of runs for him was pretty impressive.

Phil Miller

Well, a couple things real quick: For a guy had faced that played for five or six different franchises people are gonna want to know around here, Minneapolis. Do you have an opinion on what the Hall of Fame puts on the cap on your plaque?

Jim Kaat

Oh, it'd be the Twins. No question.

Phil Miller

They'll be glad to hear it. Why?

Jim Kaat

Well, because I pitched it at or I was in that organization for 16 years. And, you know, when I look back on my career, every place I went, became a step up for me which I was grateful for the White Sox and

the Phillies. We had great teams there. And then briefly, were the Yankees, which the Bronx Zoo was always a entertaining experience, and then the Cardinals winning the World Series. But you know, starting with Washington and Twins, that's really my body of work, and I still do some work for them. So there's no question that that's the team I'd want to be identified with.

Phil Miller

And also, I've always thought that you'd be good for broadcasting Hall of Fame to how much do you think your broadcasting career helped get you to this this point today?

Jim Kaat

I don't think the broadcasting career well, I take that back, it may have kept me, you know, it may have given me the exposure. I know my friend Tim McCarver called me several years ago and asked whether I would be interested in being on the ballot for a Hall of Fame broadcaster, and I said, you know, I really feel that those guys that have been lifers like Joe Castiglione, that have been there, they really deserve that. But whether the exposure being a broadcast helped, I don't know, I think what helped today I was having players there that I played with and against. And even though we're driven by numbers today, give you an example WAR. Now, I think it was Kenny Rosenthal, I called a few years ago, and my WAR number was listed. And I said, if I come in, in the game, and the sixth inning, just didn't relief to try to work on things and I give up four runs, does that hurt my WAR? And he said, Yes, well see, I would do that. If I had a short start. Then I would say to Sam Mele, or Cal (Ermer) or whoever the manager was, I said, Hey, if you got a blow out game, you want to save your bullpen bring me in. I can find some things out even though I think one day I gave up a home run to Gary Peters to him to Tommy McCraw just got smoked. But then my next seven or eight starts, I won. So those kind of statistics, you know, kind of hurt us in those days. But that's kind of what we did.

Jon Shestakofsky

We have time for a few more just a note to the folks concerned about the next media session. Don't worry, these media sessions will not overlap. So the Tony Oliva availability will begin shortly after the conclusion of this call. And with that, the next question will be from Pat Borzi. Go right ahead and unmute yourself, Pat.

Pat Borzi

Jim, congratulations.

Jim Kaat

Thanks, Pat. I appreciate it.

Pat Borzi

I'll be quick. You've had some days like this that did not end as happily as this one did. How did you spend today? And then how much did you think about the moment that the vote would be announced before? Was it is the most uncomfortable pressurized day?

Jim Kaat

You can imagine even though in the back of my mind, I keep saying it's not gonna happen but you do your due diligence you stay in and you know, you just like today I put the headphones on. I watched golf, I watched football I watched anything I could to keep my mind off it. And then, you know, then you have that time period where you think you'll get the call because I've been through it before so it is excruciatingly uncomfortable. I never really thought it would come but it is as Teddy Simmons I think said last year, I wouldn't change a thing. It's certainly been worth the wait. I guess it would have been an impossibility. But I would love to have had my dad. I mean, I can't tell you how quietly proud he would be. I have one of my favorite pictures of memorabilia is my dad standing in front of the museum when he drove to Lefty Grove's induction in 1947. And he was such an avid fan and a big Lefty Grove fan. That's really the first baseball star that I remember hearing about. So that would have been nice for that to happen. But other than that, I'm just grateful that it's now and I'm going in with Tony.

Pat Borzi

I'm glad too. Congratulations again. We'll see you the next time you're in Minnesota.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Time for a few more. Next up, Do-Hyoung Park. You can unmute yourself now.

Do-Hyoung Park

Jim, congratulations. It's great to see you get in.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Do-Hyoung Park

What has the wait been like since you were last on that ballot in 2014? With things getting pushed back and having been so close? And was there a hope or an expectation that something could change on that committee to make things different as it was this time?

Jim Kaat

Well, the wait other than today, the wait is, is not a problem. I've always said that. And it's just the way it is, is that you have to have the right people on that committee and to get 12 out of 16 is difficult. I mean, you're talking about players in my case, my last year was 1983. And so you're talking about people that maybe didn't even see me pitch back in those days. So you're relying on who in the committee is going to be able to speak on your behalf and prove to the other people that they think you're Hall of Fame where the

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question will come from Robert Grayson. Robert, you should be able to unmute yours.

Robert Grayson

Yes, here I am. Yes. Thank you very much. Yeah, I I wanted to know what the difficulty is in going from being a starter to a reliever. How hard was that for you?

Jim Kaat

Well, the early times were hard because as a starter you know, there's not as much urgency in the first inning you know, you're getting the feel of the mound and even if you give up a couple runs while you're still in the game, and I think when you came in as a reliever, all of a sudden the feeling was oh, I have to go as hard as I can and you tend to overthrow and I think that was the biggest thing is warming up differently because you didn't take that you know, he had three days off and then you take about 20 minutes as a starter to get warmed up or 15, somewhere in there. And as a reliever, you have to learn to get up and get ready in a hurry. So those are the adjustments. I had to make to go in and just hey, you got to pitch just the same. I mean, Bruce Sutter was the gold standard for that my teammate Bruce he, he could pitch the ninth inning just as if it were the first pressure wise and everything that's kind of what you have to do to learn to do as a reliever.

Robert Grayson

And then you made another transition, going from the field to the booth and talking to players who you played with. What was that like for you to do?

Jim Kaat

Well, I talked a lot with Timmy McCarver when we were teammates with the Phillies and he was going into broadcasting I never really saw that as a as a second career. I coached the pitchers for Pete Rose for a year and a half. I enjoyed that. But that was an easy transition at first, you know, as Timmy reminded me and trained me that you have to learn. I mean, even though I buddies with these guys, you have to be honest and objective if you're just honest and objective. And if you think you said something that might have annoyed a player just be in the clubhouse the next day, face to face, see if he's got anything to say. Then I worked games with Dick Enberg, Dick Stockton, I learned from John Madden, so I really approached that craft, just like I did pitching I mean in pitching, I talked to Whitey Ford, to Robin Roberts, Warren Spahn, you know, I took great delight in finding out how they did things. And I did the same in broadcasting.

Robert Grayson

One other quick thing, how much the 300 wins mean?

Jim Kaat

I never saw it as an obsession. I knew it was sort of a benchmark for pitchers. But when Whitey he explained he said we got Sutter. I'm going to build a staff for the ninth inning back I think you could really be effective as a lefty reliever. Well, my, my goal at that time was to pitch as long as I could, and pitch for teams that had a chance to win. So I saw that as a chance to win. And I think if I like Gaylord went on to San Diego, he said I just want to start every four days and get my 300 wins, which he did. But I wasn't obsessed with it. It probably would have put me in a position to be voted in earlier, but I wouldn't trade those years as a reliever for the Cardinals for anything.

Jon Shestakofsky

We have time for two more questions, Bill Francis, your next.

Bill Francis

Jim congratulations.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Bill Francis

Great news. I could be wrong. But I think you've been in the Hall of Fame in the past and even maybe even Induction Ceremony is in the past.

Jim Kaat

Oh yeah. Lots.

Bill Francis

Can you talk about your takeaways from your experience in Cooperstown?

Jim Kaat

Well, you know, I mentioned my dad going to the induction of Lefty Grove in 1947. Then in 1966, we played the Hall of Fame Game, the Cardinals brought up a skinny left hander to pitch against this named Steve Carlton. And that was, I probably was from here to the wall in my office here of reaching out and touching Ted Williams, and Casey Stengel, they were the two inductees that year that had out in the courtyard behind the old museum. And then I was at Schmidty's, I was at Bruce Sutter's. I was at Harmon's at 84. Harry Kalas, Richie Ashburn. So I've been there, to inductions for my teammates many, many times.

Bill Francis

What's your takeaway, you see the excitement, you see the buzz about it, knowing now you're going to be there?

Jim Kaat

I think, at my age and, and what I was, as a pitcher, as I said, not a dominant pitcher, I've just, I'm more grateful that they, they rewarded durability, dependability, you know, over a period of time, rather than just a short period of time, like Sandy had a short period of time, and he was so dominant, but I was never going to be that dominant. But I can, I can take pride in saying I never really missed a start. Because of an arm injury. I slid into second and broke my wrist in 72 that cost me maybe half of the best season I was having and then I I pinch ran and 76 and get third base and cracked my kneecap. So two base running injuries hurt my career, but I always took pride in saying I want the ball every four days. And that's just the way we were trained.

Bill Francis

Jim one little thing, one last thing, I'm sure you've been in the Hall of Fame plaque gallery, now you're gonna, you know, a number of months, you're gonna have a bronze plaque of Jim Kaat alongside,

Babe Ruth and Jackie Robinson, Ted Williams. Must be a little overwhelming. Now that's gonna be there forever.

Jim Kaat

Yeah, I think they have to have a back row. There's got to be degrees to the Hall of Fame. So I think they probably have a back row there for me, and I'll wave to those guys up there. But it is, it is pretty awesome to think of. You know, I know in my career ended Bowie Kuhn had told me that was the longest career for a pitcher in history. And then Tommy John pitched past me by year and then Nolan by another year. So I took a lot of pride in, in being able to pitch for as long as I could.

Bill Francis

Thanks, Jim, see you in July.

Jon Shestakofsky

Thank you. And our last question will be from Steve Zalusky. Steve, you can unmute yourself now.

Steve Zalusky

Congratulations, Jim.

Jim Kaat

Thank you.

Steve Zalusky

Um, how important were your years in Chicago? And what are your thoughts about the results? Regarding your former teammate, Dick Allen?

Jim Kaat

Wow, I'm sad. I'm sad. I'm disappointed. It's just one vote. I know the committee can only vote for four. But Dick and I became such close friends there. You know, I took them out to see Secretariat one day out in Kentucky. And in fact, this little plaque right up here on the wall has his all time teammate team and I'm the left hand pitcher on that team give me the right he just he loved playing behind me because I work fast, threw strikes. So I could regale you with stories about Dick for the next half hour. But my time in Chicago was so important because the Twins really thought it was done. I was surprised when I got the call from Roland Hemond, I was out playing golf in Minneapolis and a guy drove out in a cart sitters guy named Roland Hemond on the phone. I went and got the phone. And he said, We just picked up your contract off waivers. I said really? I mean, they were in third or fourth place. And the rumor was that maybe the Yankees or the Royals would pick up my contract because they were looking for a left hander. And he said no, we're looking ahead to next year. I was making \$60,000. He said we're prepared to give you a contract for \$70,000. I said, man, I'd have to win 20 games in Minnesota to get that from Calvin Griffith. So I said, I'm in so I went there and then got back with Johnny Sain who was the pitching coach that had more impact and influence on my career than anybody he and Eddie Lopat. And Johnny ended up getting me to have a little quicker release kind of a funky looking quick pitch motion and I ended up having to 20 games season so and I would have loved to have stayed there but Mr. Allen was losing money. Roland came to me and said, we think we can get some young

players for you. And there's three teams in the National League East that are looking for a veteran pitcher, the Mets, the Pirates and the Phillies. And I'd watched the Phillies in spring I said, boy, you know, Philadelphia was my dad's favorite team, so if I'd go to the Phillies, that'd be great. The Mets got Mickey Loich, and the Pirates got Doc Medich, and I went to the I went to the Phillies from there, but I really enjoyed my, my years in the south side. Chuck Tanner probably saved my career. You know, I was really getting hammered the early part of 74. Harry Caray was saying, hey, when you're slow curve, and your fastball are the same speed. It's time to call it a career, you know, he was calling for my scalp. And so Chuck called me in one day after a road trip. And we were at O'Hare Airport. He said, come in early tomorrow. And I figured, well, I'm going to get my release. He's going to say nice career, but it's kind of over, call me and he said, You've been winning 15 games a year in this league for 15 years. And I think you can still do it. And so you're going to start a week from Monday against Cleveland. My record was four and six. Went down the bullpen with Johnny worked on a quick motion ended up the year 21 and 13. I would say a majority of managers would probably have let me go then, but Chuck stayed with me. And he knows because I told him many times how grateful I am for that.

Jon Shestakofsky

That's wonderful. And this concludes our question and answer session. Jim, thank you so much for joining us. We look forward to celebrating your exceptional career at the 2022 Induction Ceremony which will take place on July 24th in Cooperstown and thanks to all the media members for joining us on this call. We will continue our conference call schedule next with fellow class of 2022 Electee Tony Oliva on a separate Zoom link, beginning in about five minutes. Thanks again, everyone for joining us.

Jim Kaat

Great. Thanks, guys. Thank you.