

Fred McGriff Press Conference

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Jon Shestakofsky 00:00

Hello everyone and welcome to the Hall of Fame's Contemporary Baseball Era Players Committee introductory press conference. Joining me here on the dais are Josh Rawitch, president of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. The newest member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Fred McGriff, and Chairman of the Board of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and the non-voting Chair of the Contemporary Baseball Era Players Committee, Jane Forbes Clark. I'd also like to welcome Fred's wife Veronica, who flew out with him early this morning from Tampa. Thank you. And with that, I welcome Jane to make some opening remarks.

Jane Forbes Clark 00:45

Thank you, Jon, and thank all of you for being here today. As you know, the National Baseball Hall of Fame's 16-member Contemporary Baseball Era Players Committee met yesterday to consider eight individuals for Hall of Fame elections. Individuals whose greatest contributions to the game have come since 1980. The ballot selected by the 11-member Historical Overview Committee of the Baseball Writers' Association of America and on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Hall of Fame, I would like to thank both committees for their thoughtful work. You heard the results of this work last night on MLB Network and we are so happy to have Fred McGriff on the dais with us today. He was an incredibly productive hitter across 19 Major League seasons, with the Toronto Blue Jays, the San Diego Padres, Atlanta Braves, Tampa Bay Devil Rays, Chicago Cubs and the Los Angeles Dodgers. A five-time All Star first baseman, he hit at least 30 home runs in 10 different seasons, leading the American League in 1989 and the National League in 1992 and finished in the Top 10 in MVP voting in six consecutive seasons. The cleanup hitter for the Braves' 1995 World Series Championship team, he drove in 100 or more runs eight times and ended his career tied with Lou Gehrig with 493 homeruns. He now joins the Baseball Hall of Fame team and our class of 2023. Congratulations, Fred. And if you would stand and Josh could help you on with your new jersey. We're looking forward to our *Induction Ceremony* in Cooperstown on Sunday, July 23, 2023, where Fred will be celebrated along with any electees who emerge from the BBWAA voting. That announcement will be on January 24th. Thank you all very much. Jon?

Jon Shestakofsky 04:37

Thank you, Jane. And before we open for questions from the media, we do welcome Fred if you'd like to make some opening remarks as well

Fred McGriff 04:47

Thank you. Hello, everyone. I mean, personally it is, this is a dream right now. When I first played that one day in the big leagues, that was my goal but to sit here is just such a great honor to be here this time and Josh, Jane and I just want to thank the whole the committee everyone and this is just a awesome beautiful day and it's time to just enjoy myself and as you know, this isn't my Tom Emanski hat but this is a this is a whole lot better. This is beautiful.

Jon Shestakofsky 05:26

That's great. Thank you, Fred. And we'll now take questions. If you would like to ask a question, please raise your hand and wait for a microphone and we ask that you please make clear to whom on the dais your question is being directed. There will be a limited amount of time for conversation after the press conference, but we do encourage you to ask any questions during this Q&A portion of the press conference. So we are now ready to begin. Any questions? Yes. If you just wait for the microphone.

Clinton Yates 06:01

Clinton Yates ESPN, Fred, you're up there all by yourself. Pretty interesting position to be in for a guy who played for so many different teams and who made so many different friends and teammates over the course of your career.

Fred McGriff 06:10

Hey, it's a beautiful game. A beautiful thing, unanimous, you know what I'm saying? It's Crime Dog's Time.

Jon Shestakofsky 06:20

Yes, just a couple of rows ahead.

Kelsie Heneghan 06:28

Hi, Fred. Congratulations, Kelsie Heneghan milb.com. I know you spent six years in the minors including being traded. How did that time help shape your career?

Fred McGriff 06:37

But to think about it, when I was young, it was all about for me making adjustments and so forth and being in the minors, and on all those buses and so forth. I signed out of high school when I was 17 years old and so just having a chance to develop my game. And it was interesting because the Yankees drafted a first baseman named Billy Williams, because I was drafted by the Yankees and so forth. And so he got most of the playing time when I first started. And so for me over the years, just having to just keep developing and working on my game and trying different stuff, and so forth and so the minors were huge for me until I finally made it to the big leagues and went from there.

Jon Shestakofsky 07:23

On the left.

Ben Verlander 07:25

Fred, what did those years in Atlanta mean to you, and what does it mean to know that you're now in a club with Chipper and Tommy and Greg and Smoltzy and Bobby?

Fred McGriff 07:34

My whole experience in Atlanta was just awesome. Just a great bunch of guys. And when I joined that team, we were 10 games out of first place and I got traded from the Padres, and I come over there and they're like oh, man, Fred, you know, the Padres, you had such a good team and then they decided to

tear it up. And so in the middle year, we're 10 games back and so it was like, come on, we need some help. And so that first night, I had a little rib injury and finally I was able to play and I hit a homerun and so forth and we went from there. But we still came up a little short. We lost to the Phillies in 93 and then the strike year in 94 and sort of come together in 95 and to finally win it was the ultimate, but I tell people all the time, you know Bobby Cox, great man, he was the leader. He kept everybody together, the boss man, and so forth. And just a good bunch of guys from Greg Maddux and Glavine and the Mark Lemkes. You go down the list, David Justices, just good people. Forget about their play on the field, they just they were just good people. So it's a great honor to be in Hall of Fame with those guys.

Jon Shestakofsky 08:53

Bob over here.

Bob Nightengale 08:54

Hey, Fred, congratulations, Bob Nightengale with USA Today. Fred, what was yesterday morning when you woke up the whole day like compared to the previous 10 years.

Fred McGriff 09:04

Well, Bob. I tried to keep my routine because like for the last month or so, once the ballot came out, you start counting down the days like okay, it's November 15 now. Now we got about 14-15 more days and so, every scenario is playing through your head like okay, what's gonna happen is situation. Who's voting? Have they already voted? Or you're going through all these scenarios and not much sleep. But, but yesterday I just got up and I walked around the neighborhood took my little walk in so far just to try to get my mind right and you know, it's Fantasy Football, so you got to watch football on Sunday. And you just just keep going. (Missing a sentence.) I did that but I just tried to keep everything normal and just go about my routine and just let's see how it plays out.

Jon Shestakofsky 10:01

Back on the left, David

David O'Brien 10:02

Fred, a couple of things going back to the Atlanta years. Was it kind of an auspicious beginning when the press box caught fire the first day there did that maybe was that an indication of what was to come? And also was the comment that Greg Maddux made last night to Smoltzy on Twitter was that kind of an indication how much fun you guys had together and how much you enjoyed each other. When he said Smoltzy is still bald.

Fred McGriff 10:24

So I didn't see that, but that's typical Greg Maddux. So, if you know, Greg, that's Maddux. But just the whole experience with those guys. In 93, people don't know but we had a little altercation with the San Francisco Giants when I was with the Padres. And so I had a little injury. So Schuerholz calls me and says, yeah, Fred, you know, I tell him that I'm hurt, I can't play. So he says you can't come to Atlanta injured. So I'm like, okay, I'll go home to Tampa. Fly from San Diego to Tampa and hang out in Tampa for a few days. And I had it all planned out where I knew if I leave Tampa like at 12 o'clock, by the time I get to Atlanta, it's gonna be 6 o'clock or so, 6:30. I know there's no way I'm gonna be in this lineup. So

drive to Atlanta, and I go in a locker room and look at the lineup and my name is on the lineup. Oh my god, boy. So now I'm heading to the training room because my ribs still sore from all the issues we had with the Giants. And so the stadium catches on fire. I'm telling you, the man upstairs. He was looking after me. You know, he's like, okay, you know, now you can get ready to play. So I spent two hours in that training room. The game starts, ended up hitting a homerun, you know, which was pretty good if I say so myself. But it was a big home run and we ended up catching the Giants. That year, probably the greatest pennant race. Still today to this day, you know, it's gonna be interesting now that they're changing the scheduling again for next year. Make it more fair. Playing each team 19 times a year that's, that's too much. So get back to playing each team 12-13 times a year. It'd be so much better for everyone.

Jon Shestakofsky 12:21

Next question on the right back here.

Ben Verlander 12:24

How's it going, Fred? Ben Verlander with Fox Sports. First off, congratulations. Really awesome. And you've talked a lot about some of the players in Atlanta that you played with and he spent almost five years there, I believe. I want to hear your favorite Bobby Cox story that you have.

Fred McGriff 12:42

Well...

Ben Verlander 12:43

...that you can tell.

Fred McGriff 12:44

We won, put it this way, we won a lot of games. But when Mr. Bobby Cox gets upset. You know when he's upset, like, oh, boy, you know, you don't want to you don't want to make eye contact with him. You just put your head down when he starts like dropping names and everything. You're like, Okay, I hope you don't say anything about me. But Bobby, I mean, we won games but when he got upset. We all knew about it. But Bobby was great because the thing about and I learned over the years that Bobby got tossed out of games so many times because he would rather get he'd rather get tossed out the game than have one of his players get tossed out of the game. So that's why he would always run interference and get tossed in his players stay in it. Stay in the game.

Jon Shestakofsky 13:32

And back on the left.

Reporter 13:34

Fred, congratulations. I'm wondering if you think it's at all fitting to be elected here in San Diego and what you remember about your time that you spent as a Padre?

Fred McGriff 13:42

Without a doubt, you know we had some good teams when I was here in San Diego and playing with Tony Gwynn and Tony was just awesome hitter and for me to just watch him swing the bat every day. I mean he was the magician he could. He was so good that he loved to put a hit and run on and if he saw that the shortstop was covering, he hit it in the shortstop hole. If he thought a second baseman was covering he could hit it to the second baseman. He was just unbelievable and watch him every day but we have Benito Santiago and Tony Fernandez and Gary Sheffield. Just a great lineup and like I said when I got traded to the Braves, they were like scared of the Padres. They were like like Man, you guys had a good old team. And so just over the years it was just great here and a lot of great memories and now they got a beautiful stadium. And I'm watching the playoffs this past year and the crowds were wild and Padres had a good team. Came up a little short, but had a good team.

Reporter 14:45

What do you remember about the day you got traded to San Diego because that was a blockbuster at the Winter Meetings at that time too?

Fred McGriff 14:51

Yeah, that was a tough one. But I tell people when I was with the Blue Jays and then they ended drafting John Olerud. You know Olerud was a great player but they told me like yeah, you know, Olerud's dad played with Pat Gillick. Okay, but you know, but Olerud was a great player but that was a huge trade, myself and Tony Fernandez going out to, coming to San Diego and then Joe Carter and Roberto Alomar going to Toronto. Put them on, they won a couple of World Series with those, what was it 92? 93? Yeah.

Jon Shestakofsky 15:35

The front here.

Barry Bloom 15:37

Hi Fred, Barry Bloom from Sportico.

Fred McGriff 15:39

What's up?

Barry Bloom 15:42

Congratulations.

Fred McGriff 15:43

Thank you.

Barry Bloom 15:43

Very well deserved. So back to the Padres. You know the history, you know with guys who have had spot careers and in the Hall of Fame from the Padres you know, you have Tony and Hoppy. But you have Gaylord Perry who just passed away, you know, Goose is in the Hall of Fame. I mean, there's Roberto who you just mentioned, there are a lot of Padres, who played spot times with that organization

like you who were in the Hall of Fame. What's your feeling about it and how does that cast your you know your career in your Hall of Fame membership now?

Fred McGriff 16:20

You just you named off some great players. And so it's an honor to have been put on that Padres uniform and being able to play with them over the years and would like to say Gaylord Perry passed away and Tony Gwynn and so forth. And Tony, I still you know, so many great memories, playing with Tony Gwynn, but it's just good stuff.

Barry Bloom 16:44

Okay, so what's the insignia on your plaque on your cap in the Hall of Fame?

Fred McGriff 16:54

We haven't quite had that discussion. We will. We're working on some things. Stay tuned for in the future. We will let you know.

Jon Shestakofsky 17:05

In the front on the left.

Mike Wilner 17:07

Hey, Fred, Mike Wilner from the Toronto Star. I know people up there hoping for that decision on on the insignia on your plaque. But you mentioned Pat Gillick before and there's an old story that said when he traded for you, a reporter called him up and said can I talk about the Dale Murray trade? And he said yeah, but I'm hoping in a couple of years we're going to be talking about it as a Fred McGriff trade. What was it like for you to be going to a new organization to have a champion like that? For you in such a high spot there?

Fred McGriff 17:40

Wel it was great at the time because I was drafted by the New York Yankees and so forth and Steinbrenner would always trade his younger players to get the veteran players in return and so for me to have the opportunity to get traded to the Blue Jays then gave me a lot of hope. Because as a young player, it's about, I just want to play in the big leagues. Doesn't have to be with this team and that team. I just want to play in the big leagues. So playing with the Blue Jays just gave me an opportunity and Bobby Mattick and the guys back in the day Bobby Mattick would work you're from, you know, sunup to sundown, sundown Bobby was gonna work you he'd hit you ground balls just constantly but they always make jokes how Bobby Mattick he wore out quite a few arms because he would have you work in all day long, but it was just another great organization starting out with Pat Gillick did a great job and I was talking to Jesse Barfield called me yesterday and we're just talking about old times and those guys they they taught me how to play the game. Lloyd Mosby, Barfield, Willie Upshaw, just as good people and they they brought me up it was great because, Cito Gaston ended up being a manager but when I first started they hit me, I played against right handed pitchers and Cecil Fielder played against lefty pitchers, but they hit us seventh and eighth. So it was great for us to break in that way instead of putting us right in the fire. They put us lower in the lineup, and so we have had a chance to learn to play the game.

Mike Wilner 19:14

But then eventually you became the everyday guy and hitting in the middle of the order and you know, things got so huge in Toronto, when the Jays moved into the Dome and then you hit the first homer off the hard rock. What was it like being part of things in Toronto at that point in time?

Fred McGriff 19:31

It was awesome. It was 50,000 people every night, you know, pack in the Skydome at the time and in a time it was the stadium. Skydome, retractable roof, and so forth and every night those folks are at the game, cheering for the Blue Jays. Okay. Blue Jays, let's play ball. You know, certain over the years, you know, it's like I tell people like the Canadian National Anthem. When you're playing with the Blue Jays. They play two national anthems every single night and so it gets instilled in you. The American National Anthem, Canadian National Anthem just it becomes a part of you the same way that the Blue Jays song. It was. Okay.

Jon Shestakofsky 20:23

David, in the back middle.

David Ben 20:30

Fred, congratulations. You've talked about Toronto, San Diego, Atlanta. I want to remind you of a place you played many, many years ago the Dominican Republic. You are more remembered there than you probably know. You played for the Alligators, the Caymanes, right, and you hit a homerun you hit more than one but you hit a homerun that people still talk about and the oldest it's become part of lexicon they say they're still looking for that ball in San Christoval. Do you have any recollection of that playing for them? Any particular long homerun you hit?

Fred McGriff 21:01

That homerun I'm not sure. It's been back in 84-85. It was a ways back but I tell people, me going down to Dominican Republic to play winter ball was the best thing I ever did because I got a chance to get extra at bats and so forth. But I was playing against the winter ball. They take it dead serious. I mean, so I'm playing against the Jose Rios, Mario Sotos, and just great pitchers. And it's like, World Series for folks. You know, and if you don't perform well, they like McGriff, malo, malo, malo that gets you but it's just a great experience. That's why sometimes it kills me when you're hearing these players say I'm not going to play winter ball. I'm not going. I don't need winter ball. I'm like go to winter ball man. It was a great experience and the thing about it is, the Dominican being a third world country. Every kid needs to just go down there and they would appreciate the United States a whole lot more. They would go down to Dominican Republic and just see everything that's going on and they just. It's sad, but kids don't want to go now they just oh, I think I'll just go to the Arizona Fall League and I just hang out a little bit. No, but no Dominican was awesome.

David Ben 22:26

In your time in Toronto, you just rolled off the names of five or six brothers that played in your era of African American players including Cito Gaston, we're at a point now with baseball where there's not a

whole ton. Your thoughts on that as a guy that played when the black player was prominent in Major League Baseball and now you're up here representing on the highest stage.

Fred McGriff 22:44

Yeah, we've got to get back to getting the African American kids to get them back involved in everything and I think it starts at the lower level. Because travel ball has changed things tremendously. When I was coming up, your parents paid 30 to 35 dollars for for your kid to play Little League Baseball. And now travel ball is 3,500 dollars, 4000 dollars, and so it makes it difficult for a lot of parents to afford to for the kids to play baseball so I believe kids just start going on different avenues and playing different sports because it's tough because unlike basketball if just one person has a basketball, then you find a rim and basket and and we all can play in football is just one football. That's all we need in a wide open area. But you know to play baseball you need gloves, you need bats, you need balls and a lot more equipment and to get kids to play so it's more difficult. They got to, the Little League program's got to try to get back going again. Some kind of way.

Jon Shestakofsky 23:58

Any more questions? We have time for one more. All good. Well, thank you all for joining us today and congratulations again to Fred McGriff. Fred will be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday July 23, 2023 in Cooperstown along with any electees who emerge from BBWAA balloting and those results will be announced on January 24th. We hope to see you all in Cooperstown for Induction Weekend. Thank you.