

Hall of Fame ballot: Bert does belong

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Some things I don't understand - like why in the heck is Bert Blyleven not in the Hall of Fame?

As I fill out my ballot for the 2006 Hall of Fame, I'm absolutely amazed that not even half of the voters (41 percent) voted for Blyleven last year when his credentials are so outstanding:



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* Fifth on the all-time strikeout list with 3,701. Only pitcher among top 14 in strikeouts not in Hall and only Nolan Ryan, Roger Clemens, Randy Johnson and Steve Carlton have more.

* A total of 287 career wins. Only Tommy John with 288 has more wins but is not in the Hall of Fame.

* Pitched 242 complete games. Only Gaylord Perry and Carlton had more among modern day hurlers.

* Won 15 games by the score of 1-0. Only Walter Johnson and Grover Cleveland Alexander won more.

If you compare Blyleven with today's pitchers, there's none. Now that Roger Clemens and Greg Maddux have reached 300 wins, there's no one else remotely close to reaching Blyleven's 287 wins let alone 300 and who the heck pitches complete games anymore? Chris Carpenter and Dontrelle Willis led the majors this year with seven. Blyleven had 24 in one season (1984).

The most puzzling thing is that every writer I read claims he's voting for Blyleven and there's even a website (www.BertBelongs.com) listing his countless accomplishments along with columns by well-known sports writers.

"I don't know the answer, I hope the day will come," says Blyleven, a regular Kauffman Stadium visitor as a member of the Minnesota Twins TV crew. I've talked to a lot of writers who say they vote for me but I guess I don't talk to those who don't vote for me. I've talked with Bob Feller, Gaylord Perry and Nolan and they want to know why I'm not in. I get a little tired of answering but it's really nice to have support from your peers."

Blyleven can only guess the negatives - only one 20-win season and no Cy Young award but while he had a 5-1 record and 2.40 ERA in two Worlds Series, he also played for a lot of mediocre teams which undoubtedly prevented him from reaching the magic 300 mark. If he had received even just average support, it was projected he would have won 313 wins. "About 100 of my losses were by one run - 1-0, 2-1, 3-2. There weren't a lot of blowouts," he says.

Had he so chosen, he could have stayed around long enough to win 300 but it wasn't in his makeup.

"In 1993, Tom Kelley and Andy MacPhail said there were other clubs (Colorado, Florida) interested in me," says Blyleven. "I always felt I needed to complete what I started and that was to pitch all nine innings and mentally I didn't think I could go nine innings anymore and I didn't want to be hanging on.

"My main goal was to keep the team in the game and when I was healthy, I think I was good as any. If I lost 1-0, I felt it was my fault and I'd do extra work. I remember one day here in Kansas City at the old ball park I wasn't pitching well and I went out and ran and ran and the next time out I pitched a shutout. Guess it was my Dutch stubbornness."

To gain entrance into Cooperstown requires 75 percent of those voting. While Blyleven's numbers have gone up each of the last four years, there's a long reach from 41 percent to 75 percent and time is running out. This is Blyleven's 10th year on the ballot and he'll fall into the veteran's category after 15 years.

Unlike recent years when ballots included such lead pipe cinches as George Brett, Nolan Ryan and Wade Boggs, this year's ballot has no one sure of election. Bruce Sutter (66.7 percent) heads a list of four players who were on more than 50 percent of the ballots last year. The others are Jim Rice (.595), Goose Gossage (.552) and Andre Dawson (.523). All four were included with Blyleven on my ballot along with pitchers Lee Smith, Jack Morris and Tommy John, outfielder Dale Murphy and infielder Alan Trammell. Voters are not allowed to vote on more than 10 players.

Three of the 10 are relievers - Sutter (300 saves), Gossage (310) and Smith (478) while John won 288 games and Morris 254. Rice hit .298 with 382 homers, Dawson .279 with 438 home runs, Murphy .265 with 398 homers and Trammell, .285 including seven .300 seasons.