

Rose by any other name: Pete Rose's half-confession

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You had to admire the way Pete Rose played baseball. Judging by what he did on the field, he earned the right to be in baseball's Hall of Fame. He is still the all-time hits leader with 4,256. Over a 24-year playing career he was named to the All-Star team 17 times; and he had an incredible fielding percentage of .991 despite playing four different positions. The gusto with which he threw himself—literally—into the game earned him the nickname Charlie Hustle. Unlike some professional athletes today, Rose needed no special motivation to play hard.

But what Rose did off the field earned him a lifetime ban from the game of baseball. He bet not just on his own sport but even on games he managed—which, in baseball, is the unpardonable sin. Since 1989, when he was banned, Rose has denied ever having bet on baseball. But now, with time running out on his eligibility for nomination to the Hall of Fame, Rose has released a book in which he admits that he bet on baseball games he managed, although he claims he never bet against his own team.

Should the character and off-the-field conduct of an athlete be considered when it comes to career honors? Rose's defenders point out there are plenty of other sinners in the Hall of Fame. In Rose's case, however, his sins struck at the integrity of the sport. He betrayed the game he loved.

Reportedly, when Rose admitted his history of gambling in a private interview two years ago with baseball commissioner Bud Selig, Selig was looking for both confession and contrition from Rose. So far Rose seems weak on the contrition part and, according to some, still weak on the confession part.

In his book he refuses to beg "forgiveness like a TV preacher." He acknowledges that he probably is expected to act sorry, sad or guilty for what he did, but says, "I'm just not built that way." Showing that he still doesn't get it, he compares his situation to players who use drugs, and then, portraying himself as a victim, says

baseball had “no fancy rehab [programs] for gamblers like they do for drug addicts.” As *Chicago Tribune* columnist Steve Chapman observed, Rose’s admission sounds like other half-confessions we’ve heard from public figures, like Bill Clinton in acknowledging his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, or California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in admitting to having groped women.

If Rose is ever reinstated to Major League Baseball, sportswriters should decline the chance to put him in the Hall. And he should not be employed in the game. To allow him to manage, for example, would be like reassigning a pastor or priest who has a history of sexual abuse to another parish. From what can be judged at this distance, Rose would be well advised to enter some kind of Twelve Step program to finally confront his gambling problem. It’s likely that if he had done that 14 years ago, his plea for pardon would sound different today.