

# A-Roid opts out of Bonds, Clemens path to denial

It was just two years ago when San Francisco slugger Barry Bonds was pursuing the career home run record, then held by Hank Aaron, all the while as Bonds was dogged by steroids allegations, with many following the chase wondering out loud how long it would be before Alex Rodriguez could surpass Bonds, so to return that title to a "clean" player.

That image, though, turned out to be ill-suited for Rodriguez, as he too, it turns out, based on a 2003 drug test that Major League Baseball conducted prior to mandatory testing, was one of 104 players to test positive for performance enhancing drugs.

And Rodriguez thought it was bad having it spill out from Joe Torre's book released a few weeks ago that some Yankees teased him as "A-Fraud" in the clubhouse. In many ways, this space wasn't all too shocked by that moniker, as that nickname has been yelled at the top of the lungs often during the past five years whenever a Yankees-Red Sox game was on the tube.

Whatever derogatory nickname he might have been called previously, though, or during the remaining nine years he's under contract with the Yankees, none of that could take away from him being an automatic first-ballot Hall of Famer when it's his time to be inducted into Cooperstown.

Unfortunately, for Rodriguez, his misfortune with books goes beyond just Torre's.

After feeling the pain from having "The Yankee Years" thrown at him, that was to only be quickly followed by a devas-

tating blow from another, but not-as-of-yet-released book by Selena Roberts, that cites he had tested positive for testosterone and an anabolic steroid known as Primobolan.

Even though some may think that the vultures that have swept down to feast on Rodriguez's carcass are enjoying his recent fall a little too gleefully, one must feel for every ball player who took that test and came up clean in 2003. With a Band-Aid being torn off that raw wound of steroids' blight on baseball once again, each of those players' ire should be squarely aimed at Rodriguez and the as-of-yet-named other 103 players who turned their nose up at the idea of being clean for at least one test. Particularly any Yankee who tested clean — among them possibly his newest teammates: Mark Teixeira, C.C. Sabathia and A.J. Burnett, who will be heading to Tampa for the Yankees spring training in the coming days, only to be thrust into the middle of the mayhem that will likely only continue for most or all the 2009 season.

With that 2003 test intended to get a pulse on how problematic the use of performance enhancers was then in the game, the aim was to have less than 5 percent test positive, which would allow for the then-current policy to remain unchanged. Knowing that Rodriguez and the rest of those who tested positive chose to put the onus on the rest of their union members to carry that load was simply a selfish act.

For Roberts, she learned of the positive 2003 test through four

independent sources, and chose to spill the news on SI.com. She began to investigate that possibility after another book, "Bases Loaded," written by Kirk Radomski, a former New York Mets clubhouse attendant and admitted steroids peddler, eluded to possible links between A-Roid and the juice.

## ON THE SUBJECT OF SPORTS



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With his recent run of bad luck with book authors, it wouldn't come as a surprise if Rodriguez wanted to organize a book burning.

When Roberts had enough in her mind, to break the story, she flew down to Miami to confront Rodriguez and try to squeeze any comments out of him.

Upon telling him the short-and-sweet about what she was about to break, Rodriguez replied, "You'll have to talk to the union." With that ducking action, had he chose to say anything else, it wouldn't have been a surprise if he chose to dust off the infamous line repeated robotically in front of Congress by slugger Mark McGwire in 2005, "I'm not here to talk about the past."

And if he thought there was even an ounce of believability to

it, he could have trotted out the line Sammy Sosa chose in that same hearing, and said, "No hablo inglés."

For all the litany of known side effects for taking steroids, maybe A-Roid could have tried to claim that being unable to speak English under duress needed to be added to the list.

Over the next five days, everyone began to wonder which path Rodriguez would choose to travel in dealing with this steroids allegation.

The more preferable one — in the eyes of most players — is to try to maintain one's legacy in the game, a path well worn down by a long line of athletes.

Unfortunately, that path, while most often traveled, has proven to be the most treacherous, as the likes of baseball superstars Roger Clemens and Bonds, most notably, have discovered, that the press and the public have refused to pull back the spotlight, even after years of having it glaring down on them.

For the few athletes who have chosen to fess up about their needle sins, most notably Jason Giambi and Andy Pettitte, while having to contend with an initial firestorm of unwanted attention, they have since been witness to a waning of that negative focus, to go with a willingness by many to forgive.

While it took five days for A-Roid to beg America for forgiveness, though, his choices really were extremely limited.

The train had left the station, and outright denials of having taken steroids would likely have only reeled in a minority of the public in support, and with each

passing day, would only watch as his few supporters would continue to dwindle in number.

When A-Roid finally decided to let the world know the "truth," though, one had to be prepared to wear the pinstripe-colored glasses to digest everything that Rodriguez said to ESPN's Peter Gammons.

If we can give Rodriguez any credit, it is that he chose not to outright lie like Rafael Palmiero, who was there to testify in front of Congress with McGwire and Sosa four years ago: "I have never used steroids, period. I don't know how to say it any more clearly than that. Never."

Only for the world to find out about four-and-a-half months later that he would be suspended for 10 days after testing positive for a potent anabolic steroid, stanzolol.

For those wanting a hard-hitting interview, though, with tough follow up questions by Gammons, the interview proved to be a bitter disappointment.

And that wasn't because Rodriguez chose to skip over a litany of questions, instead choosing to answer every query thrown his way.

Of everything that A-Roid did say though, the most intriguing was his admittance to having done steroids — not just during the season with the positive test, but also in 2001 and 2002. And in so doing, he threw the Texas Rangers under the bus, admitting that all three years he played in Arlington were with a little bit of help.

Seasons where he compiled 52, 57 and 47 homers, respectively, proving to be his second,

third- and fifth-highest power productive seasons, adding up to more than 28 percent of his career home run total of 553.

For those who chose to continue to listen, it didn't take long, though, to wonder if A-Roid was auditioning for a sitcom.

First was his statement, "I don't know exactly what substance I was guilty of taking." That was just a few short minutes after he talked of the pressure he felt to perform after putting his Benjamin on the biggest sports contract of all time to play for Texas, at 10 years and \$252 million.

He was hardly done.

Rodriguez then tried to snip away any shred of a connection to his time wearing a Yankee uniform and steroids, claiming that a neck injury suffered in spring training in 2004 caused him to back away from them. That seems to be a little too clean a cut, especially for a player who just two seasons ago hammered a career high 58 home runs and collected an MVP award, all with — as he claims — no performance enhancers. With Sports Illustrated reporting that Rodriguez's agent, Scott Boras, told his client in advance the date of the first round of tests in 2004 that identified and suspended those who tested positive, and that an unnamed player also was warned by Boras to "make sure there's nothing in your system," it should be interesting to find out how Rodriguez handles this circus that will surround him for the unforeseeable future.

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