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# Author to share story of 'Hammerin' Hank Aaron'

■ One of the top storytellers and journalists will share his personal account of his idol, Hank Aaron

By Jeff Smith  
Oregon Daily Emerald

It all started with a simple baseball card, and then it became so much more.

As most eight-year old kids do, Sandy Tolan eagerly went through his first pack of baseball cards on a warm Milwaukee, Wisc. afternoon in May 1964.

His big sister, Kathy, introduced him to the fascinating cards, and she told him to look for some hometown players of the Milwaukee team — now located in Atlanta.

Tolan popped the free stick of gum into his mouth and closely scanned the pack but to no avail. His sister, on the other hand, was smiling. She was lucky enough to obtain a Hank Aaron card in her pack, but Tolan was even more fortunate when his sister gave the card to him.

Tolan became captivated with "Hammerin' Hank," and even when his hometown team moved away to Georgia, he intensively followed Aaron's astonishing career.

It has now been 36 years since that first baseball card, and Tolan has become an accomplished journalist and independent radio producer who has written articles for more than 30 high-profile newspapers and magazines.

His latest work is an engaging book titled, "Me and Hank: A Boy and His Hero, Twenty-five Years Later." It deals with heroism, racism and Tolan's personal connection with the man who owns the all-time home run record with 755.

Tolan brings his talented story-

telling abilities to campus tonight, when he reads from his new book at 5 p.m. in Willamette 100. The reading is scheduled to last about an hour and is free to the public. It will be followed by a book signing.

"Sandy is a terrific storyteller whose radio and journalistic work is top-notch," said Alan Stavitsky, the Associate Professor/Dean of the Journalism school. "He has a compelling way to tell a story beyond the facts.

*"This story is more than a sports story. It gets into the intersection of sports and life."*

Alan Stavitsky  
Associate Professor/Dean  
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This story is more than a sports story. It gets into the intersection of sports and life."

It is in this intersection that Tolan first realized his idol was involved in a situation that could not only destroy his career but also end his life.

It was 1973, and Aaron was fast approaching a mark that had been considered the greatest record in all of sports — the legendary Babe Ruth's home run record of 714. Tolan had been following Aaron as he closed in on the milestone over the scratchy airwaves of far-away AM radio stations.

He was so inspired by Aaron that he started keeping a scrapbook of his hero's home runs, starting with number 674.

Tolan continued this and soon learned of the many death threats and racist hate mail directed at Aaron. He was not well received by a large portion of the white

public who did not want to see a black man break Ruth's record.

Among the letters Aaron received was this: "You are not going to break this record established by the great Babe Ruth if I can help it. My gun is watching your every black move."

Such remarks stunned Tolan, and he decided to write a note to Aaron that said the following: "Don't listen to them, Mr. Aaron. We're in your corner. You're my hero. I believe in you."

Considering that Aaron received 930,000 pieces of mail in a two-year period — the most mail anyone has ever received at that time besides the President — Tolan didn't expect a response.

But he got one, much to his pleasure.

"Dear Sandy," Aaron wrote. "Your letter of support and encouragement meant much more to me than I can adequately express in words."

The feeling was mutual.

Aaron went on to shatter the record and escape the craziness with little physical harm. Tolan always aspired to meet his hero someday, and that magical day came on January 11, 1998. Tolan got a chance to sit in Aaron's office for 45 minutes and chat with the Hall-of-Famer, who is now a senior vice president for Atlanta. Tolan brought along his aging scrapbook and also his old letter from Aaron.

Tolan said the 45 minutes were "over in a couple of blinks." But Tolan's journey was just beginning. He dug deeper into the eye-opening life of Aaron and put together a touching vocal story for National Public Radio, which led to the book.

Tonight, at 5 p.m., the public has the opportunity to hear this remarkable tale.

## Layoff could help Lakers revitalize

By Bob Baum  
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Los Angeles Lakers didn't mind the long layoff between the second and third games of the Western Conference finals.

Time heals all wounds, and the Lakers needed time to get over that demoralizing 106-77 home-court loss to the Portland Trail Blazers Monday night.

With the best-of-seven series tied 1-1, the Blazers go into tonight's game with the home-court advantage in this series and the NBA Finals if they beat the Lakers.

"If we defend our homecourt from here in, we're crowned the champion," Portland's Scottie Pippen said. "That's how we look at it."

The Lakers headed to Portland on Thursday after a final workout at their practice facility in El Segundo, Calif.

"In order for us to be a great team, we have to bring our 'A' game, do everything right," Shaquille O'Neal said. "We just have to play, we're capable of doing that. We just have to get one of these two games or both of these games, take it to them."

The Lakers played their "Z" game in Game 2, their most lopsided loss of the season.

But they are reminding themselves that the last time they played in Portland, Feb. 29, the Lakers came away with a 90-87 victory. At the time, both teams were 45-11 and had won 11 in a row.

In Game 2, the Blazers frustrated the Lakers with a big-guard lineup that had Steve Smith or Bonzi Wells guarding Kobe Bryant, who is just 6-for-18 shooting in the series. Part of that matchup was dictated by Damon Stoudamire's foul trouble, but the Lakers expect to see more of it in Game 3.

"It's been successful," Lakers coach Phil Jackson said. "I don't see any reason they wouldn't do it."

The Blazers anticipate an all-out effort by Bryant to get his offensive game in gear.

"I know he wants to get his rhythm," Wells said. "Kobe's a great player, but we've got guys we can throw at him. The first couple of games really weren't his games, but we've got five more, hopefully, where he can really go off on us. So we've got to just continue to be humble and just try to play good defense on him."

The Lakers also have big problems matching up against Rasheed Wallace, whose emotions sometimes get the best of him. He had 38 technical fouls in the regular season and has six in the playoffs, including two when

he was thrown out of Game 1 of the Lakers' series.

In Game 2, though, Wallace had career highs of 29 points and 12 rebounds — and no technicals.

"That's definitely the way everybody would love to see Rasheed play, including himself," Pippen said. "But every game is not going to be the same game. It's hard to get that same result out of every game, but that's definitely the way we'd like to see him. We need him on the court to be successful."

With tonight's game, Pippen will move ahead of Danny Ainge into the No. 2 spot for NBA playoff appearances with 194.

Before the series, Jackson said Pippen is the only player on the Portland roster capable of providing the leadership the Blazers need to get past the Lakers. So far, Pippen has filled that role and then some.

"Since the playoffs began, he's done a 360 in his role as a leader," Grant said. "During the season, he was trying to make other guys better. Not that he's not doing that now, but it seems as soon as the playoffs started, he took on a whole new role offensively."

"Whereas he was more-swinging it to get other guys open, now he'll look to swing it and if nobody's there, he's going to go. We know he's going to go, and that's what we need him to do."