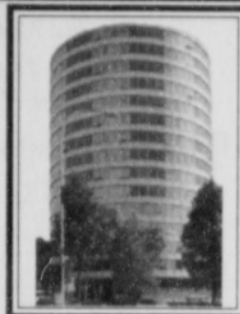


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SPORTS

Bonds' Fast Start at Plate Awes Many

(AP) — Hall of Famer Orlando Cepeda told everyone almost a decade ago that he'd never seen someone swing a bat as well as Barry Bonds.

"And people looked at me funny," Cepeda recalled. Nobody's arguing now, not with Bonds batting .500 - yep, .500! - and connecting for nine home runs among his first 19 hits. He even homered in seven straight games, one shy of the major league record.

"What he's doing is pretty special," first baseman J.T. Snow said. Bonds, a six-time NL MVP, got a much-needed day off Thursday when the Giants concluded a four-game series against the San Diego Padres. He is expected to play all three weekend games in Los Angeles against the Dodgers.

"He is really tired," manager Felipe Alou said. "You can see it in the outfield. He's been busy." That's for sure. Bonds' homer streak ended Wednesday, just short of tying the mark shared by Dale Long (1956), Don Mattingly (1987) and Ken Griffey Jr. (1993). With the game out

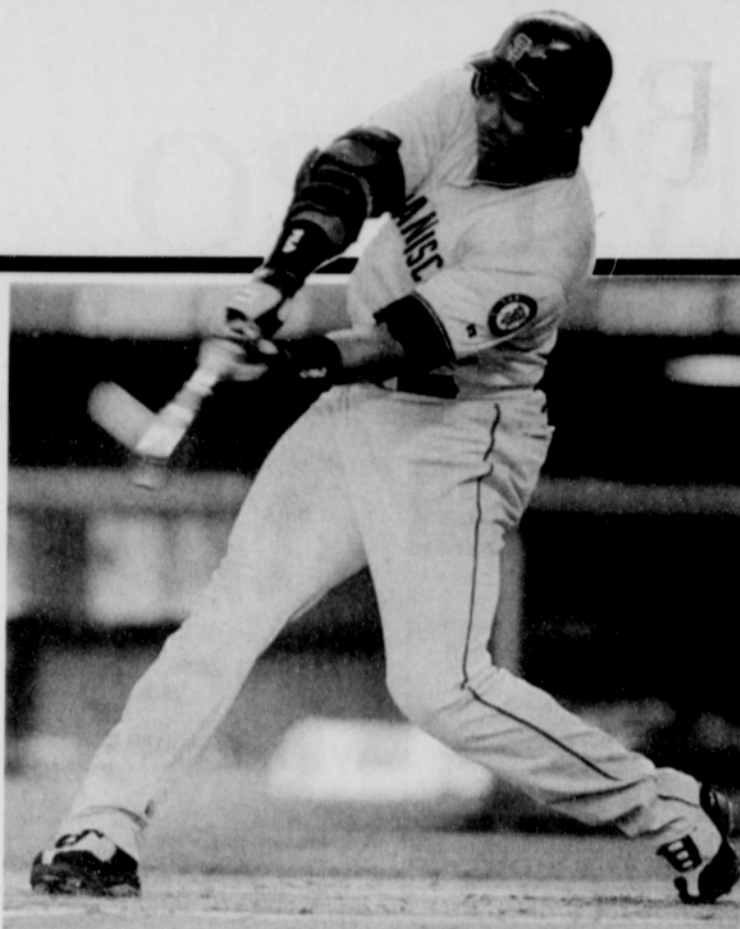
of reach - the Giants lost 11-0 - Bonds asked to be taken out in the eighth inning.

Bonds, who turns 40 in July, has 667 homers, behind only Hank Aaron (755) and Babe Ruth (714). If he stays healthy and keeps up his pace, Bonds could reach 700 this season.

He set the single-season home run record of 73 in 2001. This season, he's performed fantastically at the plate while dealing with questions about his personal trainer's drug distribution case and whether Bonds has used steroids.

"His weapon is his mind," said Cepeda, who hit 379 homers in 17 major league seasons. "He's brilliant. He amazes me the way he plays the game of baseball. In all his years, I've seen him look bad at the plate two times. Guys look bad at the plate five times a day.

"He has the best sight. It's incredible. People should come to the ballpark just to say, 'I saw Barry Bonds.' I played with Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Frank Robinson. There's nobody better than Barry Bonds, and he's nearly 40 years



Barry Bonds

old."

Rich Donnelly, now a third-base coach for the Brewers, was a coach for Bonds from 1986-92 when the slugger first came up with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Donnelly points out that Bonds has made his mark as more than merely a great hitter.

"The two greatest baserunners I've ever seen are Larry Walker and Barry Bonds," Donnelly said. "It's not always about stolen bases. ... Nobody makes a play down the left-field line like Barry Bonds. He's still the best at it."

How does he keep his body going at this late stage in his career?

"Talent," Giants trainer Stan Conte said. "Talent sums up skill, genetics and psychological all in one."

His teammates can appreciate what Bonds is doing, even if the defending NL West champion Giants are having a rough April in the win column. That seems to be wearing on Bonds, who fell six outs short of winning the World Series in 2002.

"I only take comfort in wins," Bonds said.

NBA Names Randolph Most Improved Player

Portland's Z-Bo helps rebuild Blazer's image

(AP) — Portland Trail Blazers forward Zach Randolph was disappointed when he didn't make the All-Star team. Winning the NBA's Most Improved Player award Thursday took some of that sting away. Randolph, who became a starter



Zach Randolph

this season and averaged double figures in points and rebounds, easily beat Cleveland Cavaliers forward Carlos Boozer in voting by sports writers and broadcasters with 59 first-place votes and 379 points.

"I wanted to be on the All-Star team but it feels good to win this award," Randolph said with a big smile. "It feels good."

Randolph averaged 20.1 points, 10.5 rebounds and 2.0 assists for the revamped Blazers, who went 41-41 to finish 10th in the Western Conference, two spots out of the

playoffs.

After the disappointment of missing the postseason, the honor gave the Blazers something to celebrate. On Thursday, Randolph was the star of an old-fashioned victory party, complete with balloons, hats and a band.

"I'm going to get back here next year and I'm going to get better," he said.

The 6-foot-9 forward had 43 double-doubles, tying him for fifth in the league. He had 20 or more points in 42 games, and 30 or more points in three games.

Last year, his second season in the NBA, Randolph averaged 8.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 0.5 assists.

"This is all Zach Randolph's award," Blazers coach Maurice Cheeks said. "It's about him. It's about him going out and working. ... Years ago they talked about Larry Bird coming to the arena long before anyone else did. And that's the kind of thing Zach Randolph did and really what helped him achieve this goal."

Randolph, the 19th overall pick in the 2001 draft out of Michigan State, first emerged last season when Rasheed Wallace was serving a seven-game suspension for threatening an official on the loading dock at the Rose Garden after a game. Randolph started, and the Blazers went 5-2.

Randolph, known in Portland as Z-Bo, is the second Blazer to be selected as Most Improved Player; Kevin Duckworth received the award in 1987-88.



Blazer C. Theo Ratliff blocks a shot for one of the many defensive moves that earned him NBA All-Defensive Second Team honors.

PHOTO COURTESY SAM FORENICH

Ratliff Named to All-Defensive Team

Portland Trail Blazer C. Theo Ratliff has been named to the NBA's All-Defensive Second Team.

Ratliff won the league blocked shots title for the second consecutive season, averaging 3.61 blocked shots per game for a total of 307 shots, the first time an NBA player has blocked more than 300 shots since the 1995-96 season.

He averaged 4.41 blocks in 32 games with Portland and his 141 blocks were the most in a season by the Trail Blazers since Clifford

Robinson rejected 163 in 82 games during the 1992-93 campaign.

The 6-foot-10, 235-pound center blocked five or more shots in a game 30 times and six or more shots in a game on 18 occasions.

Ratliff tied a Portland franchise record when he blocked nine shots on February 24th at Orlando. Bill Walton set the club record with nine blocks on October 22, 1974 and tied it on January 26, 1977. Mychal Thompson also tied the record on February 20, 1981.

Breaking Barriers in Golf
Sifford first black chosen for Golf Hall

(AP) — Charlie Sifford broke another barrier. Sifford, who cracked the PGA Tour's Caucasian-only clause in 1961 and was the first black member to win on tour, is the first black chosen for the World Golf Hall of Fame.

Sifford will be inducted Nov. 15, along with 1992 U.S. Open champion Tom Kite, Japanese star Isao Aoki and Canadian amateur Marlene Stewart Streit.

"This is very wonderful," Sifford said from the ceremony in Savannah, Ga. "I thank all these wonderful players for accepting me. I know I had some bad days and tough days. But it looks like everything worked out fine."

Streit is the first Canadian in the Hall of Fame. She won the U.S. Senior Women's Amateur title last year at 69, her sixth decade of winning an elite amateur title.

Kite, a 19-time winner and seven-time Ryder Cup player, was elected through the PGA Tour ballot. Aoki was elected through the Interna-

tional ballot.

That brings membership in the World Golf Hall of Fame to 104. No one from the LPGA Tour will be inducted unless Laura Davies wins two tournaments or a major this year.

Sifford was a true pioneer, along with Teddy Rhodes, Pete Brown, Lee Elder, Bill Spiller and other blacks who kept playing with hopes of getting a chance on the PGA Tour.

Tiger Woods paid tribute to them when he won the '97 Masters for his first major, and he spoke in October about the absence of blacks in golf's Hall of Fame.

"They never had a chance to play," Woods said. "Whether it's pioneers like Teddy Rhodes or Bill Spiller or Charlie, they fought all those years just to get on the tour. It's going to be very difficult for them to gain acceptance because of the fact they had no playing record on tour. One person who should get in, without a doubt, is Charlie."

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