

Baseball Hall of Fame: no class of 2021

By Jake Seiner
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK — The baseball Hall of Fame won't have any new players in the class of 2021 after voters decided no one had the merits — on the field or off — for enshrinement in Cooperstown.

Curt Schilling, Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens were the closest in voting by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America released Tuesday, and the trio will have one more chance at election next year. It's the first time the BBWAA didn't choose anyone since 2013.

Schilling, a right-handed ace who won three World Series titles, finished 16 votes short of the 75% threshold necessary for enshrinement. He got 71.1% percent this time after coming up 20 votes shy at 70% last year.

Schilling's on-field accomplishments face little dispute, but he has ostracized himself in retirement by directing hateful remarks toward Muslims, transgender people, journalists and others.

"It's all right, the game doesn't

owe me anything," Schilling said during a live video stream on his Twitter account.

He later wrote on Facebook that he has asked the Hall of Fame to remove his name from next year's ballot. Hall of Fame Board Chairman Jane Forbes Clark said in a statement that the board "will consider the request at our next meeting."

Bonds (61.8%) and Clemens (61.6%) made minimal gains and joined Schilling in falling short on their ninth tries. Both face suspicions of performance-enhancing drug use — Clemens has denied using PEDs and Bonds has denied knowingly using PEDs.

Bonds also has been accused of domestic violence and Clemens of maintaining a decade-long relationship with a singer who was 15 when they met.

Schilling, Clemens and Bonds will be joined on next year's ballot by sluggers Alex Rodriguez and David Ortiz. Rodriguez was suspended for the 2014 season for violating MLB's PED policy and collective bargaining agreement, and Ortiz's



Jeffrey Washington/Fort Worth Star-Telegram-TNS
The Boston Red Sox' Curt Schilling pitches against the Texas Rangers in 2007.

name allegedly appeared on a list of players who tested positive in 2003.

Omar Vizquel, an 11-time Gold Glove winner, dropped from 52.6% last year to 49.1% after his wife accused him of repeated domestic abuses in December. Braves star Andruw Jones, arrested in 2012 on a domestic violence charge, got

33.9% in his fourth year. Rockies slugger Todd Helton, who pleaded guilty to driving under the influence and was sentenced to two days in jail last year, got 44.9% in his third time on the ballot.

Some players missed out over old-fashioned baseball disagreements, too. Slick-fielding third baseman Scott Rolen moved from 35.3% to 52.9% and hard-throwing closer Billy Wagner from 31.7% to 46.4%.

It's the ninth time the BBWAA didn't elect anyone and just the third time since 1971. With the Hall of Fame's Era Committees postponing their scheduled elections until next offseason because of the pandemic, there won't be a new Hall class for the first time since 1960.

Cooperstown won't be without celebration next summer, though. After the 2020 ceremony in the upstate New York village was canceled due to the pandemic, Yankees great Derek Jeter and five-tool star Larry Walker will take center stage on July 25, a year later than planned. They'll be honored alongside catcher Ted Simmons and late players' association chief Marvin Miller.

Blazers fall to Thunder

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 24 points, Mike Muscala added 23, and the Oklahoma City Thunder snapped a three-game losing streak with a 125-122 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Monday night.

Damian Lillard, who had scored 30 or more points in his last three games, had 26 points and 10 assists for the Blazers. Anfernee Simons had 26 points off the bench and Enes Kanter added 13 points and 22 rebounds.

After Portland pulled close in the third quarter, Hamidou Diallo's float-er from out front put the Thunder up 105-98 with just over eight minutes left in the game.

Lillard hit a 3-pointer with 5.5 seconds left to get Portland within 123-120, then made another 3 to narrow it to 124-122 with 1.5 seconds left, but the rally fell short.

Both teams were playing the second of back-to-backs.

A year after tragedy, Kobe Bryant's legacy shines brightly

On Tuesday, Jan. 26, as I scrolled through my social media feed, there was a common thread. All of a sudden, a wave of emotion hit.

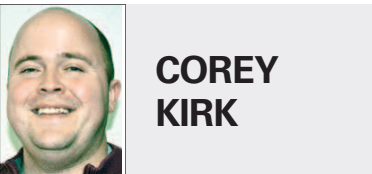
Has it really been a year? One year since the world lost Kobe Bryant?

On Jan. 26, 2020, Kobe, alongside his daughter, Gianna and seven others, lost their lives in a helicopter crash in the hills nea Calabasas, California.

I remember how I felt when I heard the news. To learn that one of the best to have ever played had lost his life, along with his young daughter and two of her teammates, I was overwhelmed by sadness.

How the National Basketball Association and the rest of the world responded was beautiful.

What Kobe taught the rest of the world on the confines of the hardwood is to never be satisfied, to always strive to do better. What



COREY KIRK

people called his "Mamba Mentality" shined throughout his career, and people strived for that same hyper focus. No matter what point in his career, he always strived to be the best.

Off the court, Kobe sought to be #GirlDad for his wife, Vanessa, and their four girls. Hearing the stories from Vanessa, friends and colleagues around the league, I understood that Kobe put his family first.

As Vanessa and their three girls went through an unspeakable grieving, the rest of the world expressed sadness, but also gratitude for Kobe's continuing impact.

"Still doesn't seem real. RIP to

those lost. MAMBA FOREVER!!" Cleveland Cavaliers forward Kevin Love said on Instagram.

"Today, we honor and celebrate both (Kobe and Gianna) of you, you have left us with so much ... but even if it isn't how we would like things to be, you are and always will be in our hearts," former Laker teammate Pau Gasol posted on Instagram.

Others paid homage in different ways. We saw Brooklyn Nets guard Kyrie Irving wearing Kobe's jersey walking into the arena the night before, and Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson wearing a specialty jersey honoring both Kobe and Gianna after clinching the AFC West on Dec. 30, 2020.

Lastly, the fans continue to pay respect to their hero. Whether it's through the painting of murals, coming in droves to the Staples Center, they continuously pay their

respects for not just the Bryant family, but also to the Altobelli, Chester, Mauser and Zoboyan families who suffered tremendous loss that fateful morning.

It's rare to see such a person of prominence pass away at just 41. And Kobe's death affected more than sports fans. He was one of the nearest things to a perfect athlete we have ever seen on the court, and someone who matured through time off the court in being the family man he was. What sticks out in my mind is one sentence.

Kobe Bryant had so much more to give to the world.

One of Kobe's more admirable ventures was promoting women's basketball. A perennial champion for the WNBA, he dove right into preparing the league's next generation when he created the Mamba Academy. That's where Gianna got to shine with her teammates Alys-

sa Altobelli and Payton Chester. He argued that top WNBA players such as Elena Della Donne, Diana Taurasi and Maya Moore could play in the NBA based on their skill set. He provided guidance and support to Oregon star Sabrina Ionescu and Katie Lou Samuelson on the college level. To see Kobe's daughter and her two teammates named honorary draft picks during the 2020 WNBA draft was one of the more touching tributes in the past year.

Kobe's ability to strive for greatness, to be a great dad and to treat women counterparts as talented equals was joyful to witness. When Jan. 26 arrives each year, sports fans' heads will hang just a little bit lower. The tragedy of that day will hurt for a very long time.

Corey Kirk is sports editor for the Baker City Herald.

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