

# An Unnecessary Apology

by MARK GREY

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This week, Mark McGwire shocked the sports world by telling us what we already knew: he used steroids. The only thing left now is for Sammy Sosa to come forward and confirm that he does speak and understand English perfectly fine, and we can all stop acting like we were surprised. Thanks to McGwire's new job with the St Louis Cardinals, he decided it was time to come clean about his steroid use and issue an apology. While I am a firm believer that it is never too late for a sincere apology, McGwire is apologizing to the wrong people.

As sports fans, we have become more spoiled than the average 14 year old in Beverly Hills. We want everything from our sports stars and are happy with nothing. We claim to want to know what the players think, but we bash the ones who speak their minds. We ask that they just shut up and play the game, but when they do we call them boring. As the "Steroid Era" comes to a close, McGwire doesn't owe the fans an apology, the fans and McGwire owe baseball an apology.

While fans all across the country scream about how they have been victimized by McGwire and all the other steroid users, the only real losers are the clean players. While every fan and reporter in the world was drooling over the video-game-like numbers McGwire, Sosa, Bonds, and others were putting up, some of the best individual seasons in baseball history were going completely unnoticed. It's easy to sit back and talk about what steroids have done to McGwire's legacy, but what about what steroids have done to Ken Griffey Jr.'s legacy? If it weren't for the steroid inflated numbers by others, people would be debating if Griffey was the greatest player who ever lived. Griffey had a four year span in which he averaged 52 home runs, but no one even noticed because everyone else was hitting 60 and 70 homers. In that magical record chase of 1998, Griffey's 56 home runs and 147 RBIs were little more than a footnote to the season. While everyone is busy erasing the tainted seasons from their memory, are they remembering the ones that weren't?

What about what the "Steroid Era" has done to Frank Thomas's legacy? All the Big Hurt did was put together one of the best careers ever, but when was the last time you heard his name mentioned amongst the all time greats? In 1996, Thomas hit 40 home runs while batting .349, which in any other era would almost guarantee you the MVP award. Instead Thomas finished 8th in the MVP race behind names like: Juan Gonzalez, Alex Rodriguez, Mo Vaughn, Mark McGuire, and Rafael Palmeiro. Has there ever been a less celebrated player to ever hit 500 home runs while batting .300 for his career than Thomas?

One reporter asked Big Mac, "Why did you use steroids?" He went from playing less than 100 games in a two year span, to hitting over one hundred homers in the same timeframe -- isn't it obvious why he used steroids? He went from being known simply as "the other Bash Brother" to not only the biggest name in baseball, but an American Icon.

As fans, we need to stop feeling sorry for ourselves. McGwire didn't use us, we used each other. Sosa didn't lie to us, we lied to ourselves. We wanted to be entertained and they provided entertainment. The Fred McGriffs of the baseball world provided us with 30 plus homers but we were at home like Tim the tool man screaming, "More power!" We could have admired Griffey's sweet swing, but we fell in love with Sammy's power. We could have been impressed with Thomas hitting the ball 400 plus feet, but we wanted to see McGwire hit it 500.

All the signs were there that something fishy was going on and we chose to ignore them. Out of no where, Brady Anderson went from 16 homers to 50 in one season. In over 100 years of baseball, there had only been two 60 home run seasons, then all of a sudden Sosa had three in four years. As Griffey and Thomas got older, their bodies started to break down on them, while Sosa, Bonds, and McGwire were only getting better with age. We watched skinny kids in their mid 20's turn into incredible hulks overnight, and we told ourselves, "they must really be working hard." We were all in awe when we saw Roger Clemens go from a washed up 32 year old pitcher with an ERA over 4, to the best pitcher in baseball at 42. No one asked any questions when Rocket, who hadn't been an All Star in four years, suddenly won 4 Cy Young's after the age of 34. We could have chosen to praise Greg Maddux's ball location, but we would rather see Clemens overpower hitters. The things that were happening in baseball defied all logic; but we didn't want logic, we wanted power. The more stuff didn't make sense, the more we tuned in

Looking back, we have no one to blame but ourselves. Blaming McGwire and company just isn't fair. It's like marrying Tony Soprano, enjoying the good life, then getting upset when he is hauled off to jail. Did you really think all

that money came from waste management? At this point, there is no need in getting upset and no need for apologies. We knew what we were getting into and we embraced it -- No need to act naïve now. I still remember where I was when McGwire hit 62 and when Bonds hit 71. They are memories that will last forever. Instead of us all pretending to be mad that they got caught, why not just be real and admit that it was fun while it lasted? Now that the cat is out of the bag, the cheaters and fans alike should apologize to the real victims: the players who didn't cheat. Let me be the first to say to Griffey, Thomas, Maddux, and all the other greats we ignored, "I'm sorry."