

Playing with numbers is baseball's No. 1 problem

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Randy Roberts

While Barry Bonds pursues baseball's home run record, a cloud of steroid accusations has settled over the national pastime, says a Purdue University sports history expert.

"There is no game that is more obsessed with numbers, and in baseball there is no number bigger than the count for home runs," says Randy

Roberts, professor of history. "The sport will never change from wood bats to hitter-friendly aluminum bats because a switch would probably dramatically inflate batters' number of hits and home runs.

"Steroids also undermine numbers, and doing so undermines the game."

Roberts says only once before in baseball's history has the game been so tarnished. In 1919, many of the Chicago White Sox players were accused of throwing World Series games for gambling purposes. Those players were banned for life. As a result Major League Baseball installed its first commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, he says.

Now, baseball has appointed former U.S. Senate majority leader George Mitchell to investigate steroids in baseball. Bonds will be a focus, and the final report will be made public.

Roberts is a regular guest on the History Channel's "Reel To Real," which shows a movie based on a historical event and a related documentary. He also has appeared on shows for PBS, ESPN, HBO, CBS, NBC and ETV.

Last year, Roberts appeared in a Ken Burns documentary, "Unforgivable Blackness," on boxer Jack Johnson. Roberts also is author or editor of "The Rock, the Curse and the Hub: A Random History of Boston Sports," "Pittsburgh Sports: Stories from the Steel City," "John Wayne: American," "Heavy Justice: The State of Indiana v. Michael G. Tyson" and "Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945 to 1990."

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