



Bonds Far From a Big Hit With Sponsors

Barry Bonds Far From a Big Hit With Corporate Sponsors Since Becoming Baseball's Home Run King

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Barry Bonds' smiling mug won't be gracing boxes of the Breakfast of Champions anytime soon. Since hitting No. 756 there have been no "I'm going to Disneyland" moments for Bonds, no cereal box immortality.

"We simply have no plans at this point," to work with Bonds, Wheaties spokeswoman Tara Johnson said by e-mail.

The home run king remains radioactive to corporate sponsors. A possible federal indictment for tax evasion and perjury, rumors of marital infidelity, alleged steroid use and an often combative relationship with the media is too much baggage for companies seeking an athlete to hawk its wares.

"Character, character, character is first and foremost in the minds of my clients," said Scott Novak, who represents National Sports Marketing Network, the trade organization of the sports business industry.

Tiger Woods earns \$100 million a year off of the golf course and Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning hauls in \$13 million. NBA superstar LeBron James hosts award shows and banks \$25 million a year in sponsorships. Baseball's top pitch man, New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter, earns about \$7 million, according to Sports Illustrated.

"I can't imagine very many major brands signing a contract with Barry to be their ambassador," said Novak, who is also a senior vice president for sports marketing at a New York firm. "Companies don't want to wrap themselves in the veneer of steroids, whether the allegations are true or not."

Bonds' marketing potential is also hurt by the fact that he is near the end of his career and he's on a losing team and has never won a championship, Novak said.

Before indictment rumors and steroid allegations, Bonds made some inroads with sponsors. After

breaking the single-season home run record in 2001 he landed short-term deals with KFC parent Yum! Brands Inc. and Charles Schwab Corp. and was paid to wear gear made by the Italian sporting goods company Fila and Franklin Sports.

But after he became embroiled in the federal BALCO steroids investigation, Bonds' already shaky relationship with corporate culture turned sour. MasterCard International Inc. called off negotiations in 2005 because of the performance-enhancing drug talk.

Corporate sponsors are careful to protect their relationships with jocks, whether its Bonds or Atlanta Falcons star Michael Vick, who had numerous sponsors, including Nike and Reebok, pull out or suspend lucrative contracts after his dogfighting charges.

Wheaties includes a "morals clause" in its deals with athletes. The company chose Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn, whose clean image and friendly demeanor has made him a favorite with fans and sponsors.

Johnson said in an e-mail that the morals clause written into Wheaties' contracts "provides us with additional protection and at the same time may establish our expectations of the athlete."

Bonds' marketing manager, Jeff Bernstein, did not return repeated calls and e-mails. Requests for interviews from Bonds' public relations staff were not answered.

Bonds reportedly made about \$2 million in endorsements 2006, a relatively small sum given his stature. He has hired two lawyers to help stem the tide of comments being made about him in the media and on the Internet.

Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling, for example, said Bonds' refusal to address accusations of steroid use is tantamount to an admission.

"We're looking now to see if other people have made similar kind of statements," Oakland civil rights attorney John Burris said. "He hired us to look at the civil issues in terms of statements that have been made."

Burris said he feels it is important to correct misconceptions about Bonds because if the slugger is indicted, then a jury pool will be tainted.

"People may think he made admissions on that and then it would be a challenge to undo it," Burris said.

If corporate sponsors are shying away from having Bonds as their public face, his new status as home run king has helped buoy his memorabilia sales. And the question marks around Bonds' baseball achievements and his Hall of Fame induction may actually help fuel future sales, experts say.

While his record-setting ball is estimated to sell at auction for about \$500,000 far less than the \$3 million paid for Mark McGwire's 71st Bonds' contentious place in history could become marketable in its own right.

Sales are hot for memorabilia from other controversial figures from baseball's past like Shoeless Joe Jackson, whose Chicago White Sox (later nicknamed the Black Sox) threw the 1919 World Series, and Pete Rose, who was banned from baseball for betting while managing the Cincinnati Reds.

"Look at Shoeless Joe Jackson, people want everything (of his) even with the tainted Black Sox thing behind him," said David Kohler, president of SCP Auctions, the company that has partnered with Sotheby's to present two home run balls by Bonds (Nos. 755 and 756) for auction.

"Pete Rose, the vintage balls or bats from the early years are very much in demand. That demand is still there," Kohler said.

While Bonds most likely will make a lot of money after his retirement from selling signed bats and balls, the steroid suspicions will keep companies from signing deals with the embattled slugger.

"The specter of steroids in sports is enough for any company to take pause before signing on the dotted line," Novak said.

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