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May 16, 2005

## Prospectus Q&A

Pete Rose

by **Graham Bensinger**

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***Pete Rose**'s iconic status in baseball has since been surpassed by nearly sixteen years of infamy. This is our second on-the-record conversation in three years; however, it's my first interview "without bars." Nothing is worse than sitting down with one of the most notorious people in sports and having limitations on what can be asked. With my reputation on the line, I had to be certain there wouldn't be any subjects untouched or off limits. It was due to having previously met Rose, having relationships with some of his acquaintances, and in part, because of a public appearance that I was able to secure the interview. One thing's for sure--the Rose of yesterday is still the Rose of today. Affable at times, defensive at others, he was both convincing and consuming in all statements made. He has a panoramic view of his current situation with regards to Major League Baseball. Rose understands what the public perception is and he's exceptionally mindful of this upcoming November. It is Rose's belief, as well as **Mike Schmidt**'s, that he had an agreement in place to be reinstated. Whether his desire to come back is due to that zealous passion he once displayed or for monetary gain, only Rose knows. Even though he can't be part of the game he clearly lives for, he still remains very conscious of what transpires. John Dowd recently said Pete talking only hinders his situation. Nevertheless, on a Saturday afternoon in St. Louis, MO, we spoke.*

*[Editor's note: Unlike most BP Q&A's, this was originally done for the radio format. We have edited interjections, pauses, and vocalizations for readability. You can hear the full version of the interview on the May 14, 2005 edition of [Baseball Prospectus Radio](#).]*

**Graham Bensinger:** Pete, when you're at collector shows, announced at a baseball game, the amount of fan support for you is overwhelmingly evident. How does that make you feel?

**Pete Rose:** Well, I think people like me because I played the way people want you to play. I give them an all-out effort every day. Modern day athletes have to focus on the importance of the crowd, the importance of the fans because, hey, it's just like doing this interview, if no one watched it, why are we wasting our time? You hate to turn a baseball game on--you see all these empty seats. You know seats are for a reason and that's to put a butt in 'em every night. Players have to understand that the whole thing is about fans. You are entertaining fans, you have to give them an effort. It's like being in the restaurant business, you got to give them a reason to come back. If they come on Monday, give 'em a reason to come back on Tuesday. No, I always played like it might be my last game because it might be, you never know what's going to happen. And that's the way to approach that and I had fun doing it so it was no big deal to do it.

**GB:** Obviously there have been some questions over the past couple of years whether or not you will be

reinstated into baseball. The amount of fan support is there, everyone ...

**Rose:** Well yeah, when you say there are some questions asked, you're just asking people like yourself, reporters with an opinion. You are not asking what the fans want. See, baseball makes the mistake sometimes because they don't really know what the fans want. They have to understand that without the fans they have nothing. I think other sports understand that, you know. So, basketball, you know, they just create stars every year and they can sell them. You know, baseball seems like it's always got a controversy going and the fans are getting tired of that, I think. It's a good game. I am not going to sit here and say it's the most important game. I mean, it will always be our national pastime because of the history it has but I don't think baseball's watched more than college basketball or watched more than NFL football. You know, I don't know about that.

**GB:** Do you think...

**Rose:** Because there is so much of it now. You have all these sports stations, everything is money. Which is good because salaries are big. Like it used to be rare to have a game on TV on Saturday. Now you can go search places and watch every game that's being played and baseball plays so many games. So people kind of get tired of watching baseball. You know, it's like the NFL, they used to play on Sunday, then Monday night, now they have Thursday nights, they have Saturday afternoon, Saturday night. So you know, it's the way sports handles it today.

**GB:** I mentioned reinstatement. We talked about your fan support. Do you think Commissioner Selig turns a blind eye to that?

**Rose:** No, but there again, you know, I can't answer for Mr. Selig; you will have to talk to him about that, okay? I get along with Bud, good guy, I believe. He's a fair man, I hope, and he loves the game of baseball. So we have a lot of similar traits. He's got a better job than I got right now but I am closing in on him.

**GB:** Commissioner Selig said Thursday at the Associated Press Sports Editors Meeting, nothing new since you last spoke in reference to your status in Major League Baseball. What were your thoughts upon hearing that?

**Rose:** I didn't hear it. It don't concern me because, you have to understand, I don't live my life going to bed every night praying that I am going to get reinstated. Sure, I would like to get reinstated. I would like to be a manager of a baseball team. Why? Because I am good for the game and I can help the game. You need people like me who want to help the game, make the game the most popular game again. Eventually the Commissioner is going to figure that out. I can't even tell you the last time we talked, so you know, you start to quote things from Bud Selig last week, I was working, I don't hang around the TVs and watch sporting news all the time like I used to.

**GB:** Obviously a crucial date for you is late November. That's the last time I guess ...

**Rose:** Well that's untrue too. You know, I believe. Now I am talking legally now. Are you saying I am running out of eligibility? Well let me ask the question, maybe I am stupid but how am I running out of eligibility on the ballot when I have never been on the ballot? Think about that. I don't know--what's the years you are allowed on the ballot?

**GB:** You are allowed until 2006.

**Rose:** Why? Who came up with that year? Because when I become eligible five years before I retired? But that's for people who are eligible for the ballot. I have never been eligible for the ballot. So I look at it as that when I am reinstated that would be the first year after my five that I am eligible for the ballot. I think people are way off base when they say that. I don't think they know what they are talking about. They are assuming that I am in the same position as a retired player that's been on the ballot so many years. Hey, I am not that retired player who's been on the ballot so many years. I have never been on the ballot.

So the clock's not ticking for me. And I have talked to legal people about this and that's the way it is. That's just guys reporting that don't know what the hell they are reporting about. Don't be like that, not that you are. But you know I am one guy when you talk to about my situation, you better have your facts straight, because I know the facts. A lot of guys who don't do their homework, they just react to what they hear on other sports programs or other commentators. You know, so ... dig.

**GB:** So you think it's just a general misconception of ...

**Rose:** Yeah, because if they would say "well, Pete Rose's eligibility on the ballot has left us because of the years." Well when was I ever on the ballot? The clock can't tick if I'm not on the ballot--doesn't that make any sense? Right? I mean that's just the way it is.

**GB:** *My Prison Without Bars*, your book in which you admitted to betting on baseball, did receive some criticism. Your former teammate, Joe Morgan had said he was a little disappointed in it.

**Rose:** Yeah, there you go again, see. Joe Morgan said it but he didn't read it. Okay? And let me explain something to you--I didn't use my book to announce I bet on baseball okay? I wrote the book after I had meetings with Bud Selig and I was in the process of writing the book and I believed, and all my people believed, that we were going to get reinstated in November. We were supposed to come out with a book in April. So common sense tells you if you are going to get reinstated, a book is a money deal, you might as well try to come out with a book as close to the reinstatement as you can. We were supposed to come out in April at Spring Training, or March, so we moved the date up closer to December and we couldn't make it for Christmas so we decided on January the 8th.

So, that was fifteen months after I disclosed what I what I needed to disclose to Bud Selig. It's not going to help me to tell you what I did or Jim Gray or Bob Costas. There's one person in this world I had to tell, and believe it or not, now you're gonna say "what took you so long?" and I'll tell you what took me so long. When I had the first opportunity to talk to Bud Selig, I told him what I did. That's how long it took me to get an audience with the Commissioner of Baseball. You can't say, and I can't even say what I'd have said if I had that opportunity in '90 or '91 or 1992. I don't know if I'd have been kicked out of baseball in 1993. But when I got the opportunity to talk to the guy that was in charge, I told him and he'll tell you the same thing.

**GB:** That you had tried ...

**Rose:** I never got a call back. What made that meeting happen? The fans, because of the reception I got at the All-Century Celebration. The reception I got at the Most Memorable Moments Celebration in San Francisco. Baseball said "well, this guy's pretty popular, maybe we should have a meeting with him."

**GB:** Steroids. Do you agree or disagree with Congress' involvement?

**Rose:** Well, I think Congress wants to get involved because baseball doesn't have as strict rules as they

should have. They are trying but, you know, I kind of, it's rough for a commissioner in baseball. I mean, he's responsible for 750 players. It's like a college football coach. You can't go home with these guys, 90 athletes every night. Other than that you have to take responsibility. I don't know how many guys are taking steroids. I really don't care if these guys have taken steroids. I only care about guys taking steroids if they took them in the last two years because that's when the rules were written. Okay? So I don't care what some guy did in '95 because there was no strict rule about steroids. You understand what I am saying?

So here's my philosophy, if you broke the rules and you can prove that someone broke the rules, then you penalize them. If you can't, just quit attacking them, saying this guy gained weight and this guy did this. Opening day for the press, I mean the press is unbelievable sometimes. You know they start harping at baseball about a young kid they suspended--you know, the base stealer. Why would he take steroids, he gets a home run once every 350 at bats. I mean if you think about it, that's the stupidest statement anybody could make. Because the last time I checked, and I think you'll be able to follow up on this, didn't Ben Johnson take steroids? What was he trying to do? Get faster wasn't he? And what was the guy that suspended, what was he, a base stealer right? So steroids aren't just for power.

**GB:** On the same note, for an esteemed baseball player like yourself, when between '98 and 2001 you had six 60 home run seasons, two 70 home run seasons ...

**Rose:** Yeah, but there again I am going to give you reasons why home runs are up. I am going to give you some reasons and if they make sense, I hope they do, and if they don't, nothing we can do about it. One, all the new ballparks are bandboxes, they are all bandboxes. Alright. Two, pitching is watered down. Three, players are, balls are juiced up. I am totally convinced of this. Four, umpires don't call strikes. And I never thought I'd ever get in front of people and defend pitchers but we don't do anything to try to help pitching today. Raise the mound again like it was in '68 when Denny McClain won 31 games and Bob Gibson pitched or 13 or 14 shutouts with a 1.12 earned run average. It's easy to hit home runs today and you get some of these strong guys playing in these bandbox ball parks, they are going to hit 60 home runs, they are going to hit 65 home runs. You know, so it sounds to me like you are saying all the guys that hit over 60 home runs were taking steroids.

**GB:** No I wasn't saying that. I was saying that it had to raise eyebrows.

**Rose:** Well, it should have raised eyebrows in 1997 then when two guys both hit over 55 or something but it didn't, so what are you going to do?

**GB:** If you had to pick one current ballplayer today to tell aspiring young athletes to model themselves after, who would it be?

**Rose:** Derek Jeter. Plays hard, he's a good player, he's a good guy and he's a winner. And he plays on the right team. The Yankees, you know whether you like George Steinbrenner or not, by the way he's got the Kentucky Derby favorite, okay, his name is Bellamy Rose, so I still read the papers. I always look at it like this, the Yankees are here and everybody else is here. I don't want to hear that stuff that the Yankees got the most money and they spend the most money. Well, when the Yankees were in their heyday four or five years ago, okay, if you go up to the middle of that team, you got Posada, you got Soriano, you got Jeter, you got Rivera and you had Bernie Williams. Where did all those guys come up through? The Yankee organization.

Sure he went out and got O'Neill, he went out and got Brosius one year, he went out and got Giambi. Give the guy credit for putting the pieces of the puzzle together. But he still relies on his bullpen and

something else George does that other people don't, he always goes out and gets pitching. He understands pitching wins World Serieses [sic]. Not offensive players. If you can add a Sheffield, good, if you can add this guy, good, but he's always, go out and get Randy Johnson, I mean if you are trying to win, go out and get Randy Johnson. I agree with Kevin Brown, I like Kevin Brown, I think Kevin Brown has got some nasty stuff. I think Kevin Brown is a great pitcher. If I had a team I'd like to have five Kevin Browns. All the Yankee fans are down on Kevin Brown right now. If I can't get five Randy Johnsons.

**GB:** Now you mentioned George Steinbrenner at the Kentucky Derby--he may have the winner. I know in your book, in reading your book you said part of while you were involved in things like that--you go to the race track was because you liked to find ways to recapture the high you got from winning the batting titles and World Series ...

**Rose:** No, it's not that. I don't know where you ever read that. Listen, I am not a casino gambler, I like to go to the races. I owned racehorses. I used to go the races when I was this big with my dad. Don Zimmer and his dad would go with us. There was nothing wrong with going to the races. It's legal. It's probably the most patronized sport we have with all the tracks running. I don't go every day. Sure I follow the Triple Crown series, I follow the Breeders Cup just like I follow the Super Bowl and I am following the NCAA semi-finals and NCAA finals. I mean it's just--I got some very good friends who are real distinguished people in this country that are into racing. I could never badmouth racing. I can tell you the guy that owns Lane's End Farm--name's Will Farrish, one of the greatest guys in the world, Ambassador to Great Britain. This guy is a big horse seller. D. Wayne Lukas or Bob Baffert, they are all friends of mine. These guys are, you know, they are good people. They care about their sport and their sport is a good sport. It's a fun sport and if people don't want to go to the races, that's fine. Maybe they will go play the stock market--what the hell's the difference? You know, you talk about all the ballparks today with the gambling signs in them. You know, I mean think about it. If you are a young kid today what are we telling kids who turn the TV on? It's okay to drink beer, it's okay to gamble cause the beer signs are hanging in the ball parks, the gambling casino signs are hanging in the ball parks and the cigarette signs used to be hanging in the ball parks. I don't want my kid doing any of the three. I don't know about you. So, but that's bringing the money in, that's bringing the money in again. See it always gets back to money.

**GB:** In conclusion, you are clearly one of the greatest baseball players of all time. Whether young, old, everyone knows about Pete Rose and what you've done in the game, how many hits you've got. If you aren't reinstated, can you be at peace with that?

**Rose:** Sure. Sure. You know because every player would like to go to the Hall of Fame. It's the ultimate goal for any player. I think I and my fans know what kind of player I was. You've got all the records, you know, and I made some mistakes but the last time I checked the Hall of Fame don't have a bunch of altar boys up there. Okay? And there's nothing wrong with altar boys. You want to start naming guys that did things that are in the Hall of Fame. I mean, there's one thing I didn't do--I never badmouthed the game and I give 110% effort to win every game and I always cared about the fans whether I was in Philadelphia or Cincinnati or Chicago or St. Louis. I always understand the fans were there. Every player should have that attitude. Sorry, am I the only guy to ever make a mistake? Evidently I am. That's just like that Congressman said, the new drug policy you don't suspend a guy permanently until he makes his fifth mistake. What happened to me? I don't get a second chance. Just give me a second chance. I don't need a third. I won't need a fourth. Certainly won't need a fifth.

Just give me a second chance. Would you give me a second chance?

*Graham Bensinger is a contributor to [Baseball Prospectus Radio](#).*

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