

Ruppert, O'Day, White elected to baseball Hall

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By BEN WALKER

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Former New York Yankees' owner Jacob Ruppert, long-time umpire Hank O'Day and barehanded catcher Deacon White were elected to the Hall of Fame on Monday for their excellence through the first half of the 20th century.

The trio was picked by the Hall's pre-integration panel — part of what once was known as the Veterans Committee — and gave the shrine exactly 300 members.

The announcement was made at baseball's winter meetings. Induction ceremonies will be held July 28 in Cooperstown, N.Y. They will be honored along with anyone chosen in January in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Ruppert bought the Yankees in 1915 and soon transformed them into baseball's most dominant team. He acquired Babe Ruth from the Boston Red Sox, built Yankee Stadium and presided over the club's first six World Series championships.

"A lot of us thought he was already in for all he'd done," said panel member Phil Niekro, the Hall-of-Fame pitcher. "We were surprised he wasn't."

O'Day umpired in 10 World Series, including the first one in 1903. He worked 35 years and made one of the most famous calls in the game's history, ruling Fred Merkle out in a 1908 play

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that long lived in baseball lore. He was the 10th umpire to go into the Hall.

White played from 1871-90, starting out as a catcher without a glove and later moving to third base. He was a 3-time RBI leader, once topping the league with 49 RBIs when baseball hardly resembled the game it is today.

Niekro credited two historians on the 16-person panel: Peter Morris and Tom Simon; with helping to illuminate the accomplishments of those who are long gone.

"It's tough to go back into the 1800s and bring that to life," Niekro said. "It was so different then — five strikes, eight balls, batters can tell the pitcher where they want it. Can you imagine? I couldn't have done that if I tried, not with my knuckleball."

Ruppert, O'Day and White all died in the 1930s — the first Hall class was selected in 1936.

Hall-of-Famers Bert Blyleven, Don Sutton, Pat Gillick and Niekro were among the voters who considered 10 candidates. Former NL MVPs Marty Marion and Bucky Walters also were on the ballot.

It took 75 percent (12 votes) for election. Ruppert and O'Day each got 15 votes and White drew 12. Bill Dahlen got 10 and Marion, Walters, Sam Breadon, Wes Ferrell, Tony Mullane and Alfred Reach each got three votes or less.

Kruk to replace Francona in ESPN Sunday booth: John Kruk is following Bobby Valentine and Terry Francona into ESPN's Sunday night baseball booth.

Is he going to emulate them and wind up managing a major-league team in 2014?

"I think that is why they are putting me in the booth," Kruk replied before adding: "Ain't no chance of that happening."

A member of ESPN's studio team since 2004, the 3-time All-Star was announced Monday as the new partner of Dan Shulman and Orel Hershisser, giving ESPN a different trio for the third straight season after 21 consecutive years with Jon Miller and Joe Morgan. Buster Olney remains as the crew's reporter.

Shulman and Hershisser were in the Sunday night booth in 2011 along with Valentine, who left to become manager of the Red Sox and was replaced by Francona, Boston's manager from 2004-11. Francona departed ESPN in October to become Cleveland's manager.

Kruk has been working in the Bristol, Conn., studio about eight days a month and has filled in on game coverage. He expects his studio work to be roughly cut in half next season when he shifts to Sunday nights, ESPN's top baseball event because it has an exclusive window.

He never wanted to be a game analyst.

"I was always uncomfortable when former players came into your clubhouse and I don't know why I felt that way," Kruk said.

He began to change his mind about game work when he accompanied Valentine's on ESPN's bus tour of spring training sites.

"I got more carte blanche ballparks than some of the other guys," he explained Sunday. "I was in the training room, talking to players. Bobby Valentine took me to some parts I wasn't supposed to be in. Wish he'd told me when I had to get out."

Kruk then realized "you get more information when you're there than just sitting in the studio."

He hit .300 and had exactly 100 home runs during a big-league career from 1986-95 with San Diego, Philadelphia and the Chicago White Sox. His most famous moment occurred during the 1993 All-Star game at Baltimore, when Randy Johnson's first pitch to him was a fastball that sailed way over Kruk's head.

Kruk pounded his heart in jest, flinched at a strike down the middle, flailed at two curve balls and then bowed to Johnson.

Part of the reason for his newfound comfort in the booth is that very few players remain from his time on the field.

"Unless Jamie Moyer comes back," Kruk added, laughing.

Actually, there are a few others, including Derek Jeter, Andy Pettitte and Mariano Rivera.

Kruk thought he may have been part of Rivera's first game for the Yankees. Actually, it was the fifth appearance for Rivera, a Fourth of July game when he pitched shutout ball for the first time — eight scoreless innings. Kruk took a called third strike and walked twice in Chicago's 4-1 loss. PUBLIC