

Vote Kevin Costner into Baseball Hall of Fame

In all of human history fewer than 20,000 men have been able to say that they once, if only for a brief shining moment, were on a big league roster and played in a major league baseball game. My friend of happy memory Jim Hisner, had one day, one game, that's all. But he was there long enough to strike out Mickey Mantle and give up a hit to Joe DiMaggio. He cherished that memory to his last day.

In fact, through the 2019 season — and not many were added in the pandemic year — 19,902 young men had played Major League Baseball in America. A few rookies will be added this year, so we probably top 20,000 in 2021.

And please don't call them all Americans. They weren't. America's game has drawn kids from across the planet. Mexico, certainly. And the Caribbean islands; remember Sammy Sosa? And Venezuela and Japan and Cuba. I suppose the majority came from towns across America — places like Van Meter, Iowa, which gave us Bob Feller; and Commerce, Okla., from whence came Mickey Mantle.

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A MOMENT

Ed Breen



Now consider that out of those 20,000 only 333 were so good at the game that they earned their way into Cooperstown, the national Baseball Hall of Fame in upstate New York. But that's not quite right; 333 are in the hall, but only 263 of them got there because of what they did on the field, pitching, catching, batting, running between the baselines.

The other 70 got there because of what they did for the game with nary a bat or glove. Executives, front office types, managers, umpires. Al Bar-



Kevin Costner, left, in the movie "Field of Dreams."

lick, for instance, a career umpire. Tom Yawkey, a front office guy and team owner. The great managers Joe McCarthy and Casey Stengel. Men like that.

All of this is by way of leading up to this: What do you think of the idea of putting actor Kevin Costner into the shrine at Cooperstown? Don't laugh. It is being discussed in some quarters and they are serious because, quite simply, can you think of anyone else who has done as much to promote, nurture, pre-

serve the game of baseball than Kevin Costner?

"For Love of the Game," "Bull Durham" and, of course, that greatest of all baseball movies, "Field of Dreams." All helped enshrine the game in the hearts and minds of those who saw the films and all starred Mr. Costner in central rolls. All helped explain the game to the uninterested and the uninitiated, sometimes with humor — Crash Davis in "Bull Durham" — pathos, such as Billy Chapel in

"For Love of the Game," and something bordering on religious mysticism by Costner and James Earl Jones and Burt Lancaster in "Field of Dreams."

Thus far there has been no room to enshrine writers, not even the great Roger Angell. The Baseball Writers of America, who vote admission or rejection of candidates, enshrine their own elsewhere. Even Ring Lardner is excluded. And George Will, whose politics is off kilter but writes so beautifully of the game he embraces. They are not there.

And I suppose you can make a case for Bernard Malamud, one of those literary titans who lowered himself to write such a beautiful story as "The Natural." You may not have read the novel — a short story, really — but you certainly saw Robert Redford bring Roy Hobbs to life. Not to digress here, but that story is based on the real life tragedy of Philadelphia Phillies first baseman Eddie Waitkus, who was shot in the lobby of the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago by an infatuated lady run amuck. He survived, she was treated

for mental illness.

But back to Kevin Costner. He had a perfect season and pitched a perfect game as Billy Chapel in "For Love of the Game." In "Bull Durham" that speech to Susan Sarandon's Annie Savoy on life as a minor leaguer tells us more about the game than we deserve. And "Field of Dreams"? It stands by itself.

Even Vin Scully muses to himself about Billy Chapel: "He's going to be a Hall of Famer," he says. Pay no attention to the fact that it's fiction.

Somebody in St. Louis wrote this about putting Costner into Cooperstown:

"By not including Kevin Costner in the Baseball Hall of Fame, a great injustice is done to honor the best season of all time, one of the best promoters the game has ever seen — three legendary movies! — and disrespects the opinion of the great Vin Scully.

"If you are a member of the Baseball Writers Association of America, do the right thing. I implore you; vote Kevin Costner into the Baseball Hall of Fame."

To which I say "amen" and "play ball."

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