



## KEN ROSENTHAL'S INSIDER

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## SPEED READS

■ The A's face a tremendous challenge trying to reach the post-season after losing Mark Mulder to a stress fracture in his right hip. The past two seasons, the Big Three of Mulder, Barry Zito and Tim Hudson were 49-9 after August 1, including 16-3 by Mulder. No trade acquisition or Class AAA call-up can fill that void.

■ Tigers manager Alan Trammell is doing the right thing by keeping Mike Maroth and Jeremy Bonderman in the rotation. Neither pitcher will be scarred permanently if he loses 20 games, and managers who attempt to manipulate statistics violate the sport's integrity. The games should dictate stats, not the other way around.

■ Memo to the Red Sox: Stop complaining about perceived negativity from fans and media. Sox fans might be pessimistic, but they're among the most passionate in the game. The players should ignore side issues and remain focused on winning the franchise's first World Series since 1918. Think the fans wouldn't like to see that?

## Bonds doesn't need sympathy votes

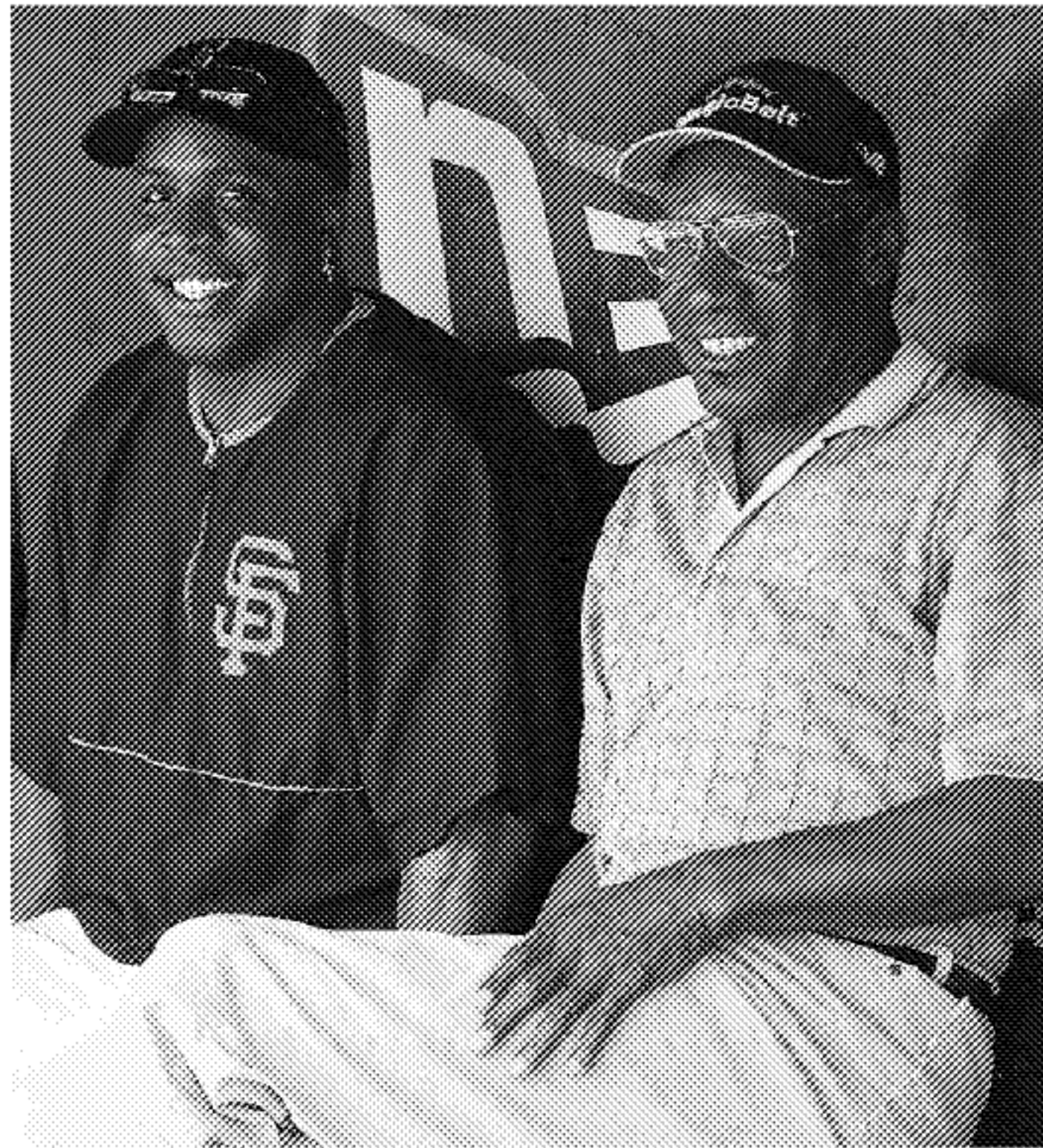
**T**he loss of a parent creates a void like no other, but if you're wondering how it will affect Barry Bonds' ability to hit a baseball, consider his remarkable performance this season while his father was ailing.

Bobby Bonds underwent surgery on a brain tumor in April, was hospitalized for pneumonia in June and required open-heart surgery in July. He had been ill for nearly a year with lung cancer, yet Barry continued to leave his mark as one of the greatest players of all time.

It's obvious Bonds cared deeply about his father; he left the Giants to be at Bobby's side for five days earlier this month, then again to mourn his death last Saturday. But in the batter's box, Barry's focus never wavered. His season is almost unimaginable considering the emotional strain.

Losing his father will humanize Bonds, a player many fans find it hard to relate to. But it shouldn't be necessary for them to gain a full appreciation of his accomplishments. Bonds' feats are recorded in greater detail and receive greater exposure than Babe Ruth's, Willie Mays' or any of the game's other all-time legends. And still not everyone grasps what is before them, even now, when Bonds, 39, leaves us breathless almost once a week, sometimes more.

Bonds vs. Albert Pujols? Stop it. Bonds is the National League MVP. Pujols is king of all mortals. Actually, that's not fair to Pujols, whose season, too, is otherworldly. But it's a testament to Bonds' greatness that the MVP voting should not be close even though Pujols, according to STATS Inc., could become the first N.L. player to finish in the top two in each Triple Crown category over a 162-game schedule. Heck,



The strain of his dad's illness did not halt Barry Bonds' production.

even if Pujols becomes the first N.L. Triple Crown winner since Joe Medwick in 1937—doubtful, given that he began the week trailing Bonds by five homers and Preston Wilson by 13 RBIs—he shouldn't be MVP. For precedent, remember Ted Williams was an A.L. Triple Crown winner but not the MVP in 1942 (Joe Gordon) and 1947 (Joe DiMaggio).

Pujols, 23, is a wonderful player, the first to finish with 30 homers, 100 RBIs and 100 runs scored in each of his first three seasons. But he is surrounded by better hitters with the Cardinals than Bonds is with the Giants. Pujols' home park is neutral, not favoring pitchers or hitters. Bonds' home park is the most difficult to hit homers in in the majors. And Pujols doesn't force opponents to alter strategy, as Bonds does.

"The game changes around Barry," says Cubs center fielder Kenny Lofton, a teammate of Bonds' last season with the Giants.

"That's the bottom line."

Last week, just when the Bonds-Pujols debate was beginning to stir, Bonds interrupted the discussion with one of the most dramatic home runs of his career. It came after he had missed four games in Montreal while spending time with his

father. The Giants, also playing without injured regulars Rich Aurilia and Ray Durham, lost all four games, scoring only four runs. The Cardinals went 2-2 in a similar stretch without Pujols, scoring 19 runs in their two victories.

Bonds' walkoff shot leading off the 10th inning against Braves lefthander Ray King snapped a five-game losing streak and was the first extra-base hit by a lefthanded hitter allowed by King in 78 at-bats this season. Two nights later, Bonds again stunned the best team in the majors, connecting with one out in the 10th against righthander Trey Hodges.

"This built-in flair for the dramatic ... forget that series; it's every series," Braves general manager John Schuerholz says. "He has more ability than any player on any other team to turn a game around, to win a game

single-handedly."

Considering the backdrop, Bonds' season is proving to be as distinctive as his record 73-homer performance in 2001. But the award is for most valuable player, not most sympathetic figure. Just as voting baseball writers avoided penalizing Bonds for his prickly personality when awarding his five previous MVPs, they should not get all warm and fuzzy over him now. Nor should they take a different type of subjective view and anoint Pujols because of his Fresh-Face Factor.

Bonds began the week leading Pujols by 90 points in on-base percentage and 77 in slugging percentage despite Pujols' league-leading .365 batting average. Joe Sheehan of *Baseball Prospectus* points out two other sets of statistics that are especially revealing. Bonds' on-base percentage and slugging percentage at Pac Bell, a park that negates lefthanded power, are the best home marks in the N.L.—yes, even better