

When You Say \$120 Million, You've Said it All

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Slugger Barry Bonds recently rejoined his San Francisco Giants after missing the first five months of the baseball season. Bonds was out with a knee injury but hoped to make it back for the last month of the season to help the Giants in their playoff run and to add to his career home run total.

Bonds is currently chasing Babe Ruth's mark of 714 career home runs, and then he'll set his sights on former Brewer Hammerin' Hank Aaron's Major League Baseball record of 755 career dingers. He'll get there in a hurry if next season he played like he did in 2001, when Bonds hit a single season record of 70 taters. He broke Mark McGuire's previous record of 65 homers that he had set the year before.

McGuire had broken Roger Maris's longstanding record of 61 in '61 - he hit 61 home runs while playing for the New York Yankees in 1961. After McGuire broke this record, and especially since Bonds set a new mark, Roger Maris's name has faded away into baseball's background - that is until his family took on a different kind of brewer in court.

Maris's family, which owns a beer distributorship in Gainesville, Florida, sued Anheuser-Busch for defamation and sought \$5 BILLION in damages. The Maris family claimed Anheuser-Busch defamed their good name when the nation's largest brewer announced it was canceling the family's contract for selling repackaged, out-of-date beer. The family further alleges that Anheuser-Busch plotted to destroy the reputation of the family as part of a grand scheme to seize the distributorship so it could transfer it to friends or relatives of the Busch family.

Anheuser-Busch vehemently disputes the Marises' claims, citing the fact that if an allegation is true, it does not constitute defamation. To defend its position, Anheuser-Busch pointed to affidavits of former Maris drivers who stated old beer had been repackaged by the distributor and that it also rubbed off dating codes. The brewer also canceled the contract because the family failed to keep records of visits to retailers and repeatedly ignored Anheuser-Busch's concerns about high turnover and supplying proper uniforms for drivers.

To prevail in the lawsuit, the Maris family had to present 'clear and convincing' evidence that Anheuser-Busch's actions defamed them. In literally the eleventh hour, as the jury was deliberating, the parties settled the case. The Maris family agreed to drop its lawsuit in exchange for a \$120 million payment from Anheuser-Busch.

Anheuser-Busch granted Roger Maris the Gainesville beer distributorship as part of his deal to play baseball in the late 1960s for the St. Louis Cardinals, which were then owned by Anheuser-Busch. Maris helped the Cardinals make it to the 1967 World Series title and the 1968 National League pennant. Maris died in 1985.

After learning of Maris's beer distributorship deal, Barry Bonds is now hoping to be traded to the Tigers so he can end his career in Detroit. As everyone knows, Mike Illitch, the owner of the Detroit Tigers, is also the owner of Little Caesar's Pizza. I'm sure Bonds is angling to get himself a "Pizza! Pizza!" franchise as part of his contract. He may need the extra income during his retirement if fans stop buying his home run balls off Ebay because of the steroid scandal.

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