

## Article

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## **Difference, Dissonance, and Redemption in Sport Heritage: Interpreting the Tangled Legacy of Pete Rose at Two Museums**

Induction into a hall of fame can be the ultimate accolade for an athlete. Arguably, the most famous of all sport halls of fame is the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (NBHF) in Cooperstown, New York. The NBHF is widely considered the primary authority concerning baseball enshrinement, although other baseball halls of fame may differ in their assessment of particular players. One such case involves Pete Rose, baseball's all-time hits leader, who received a lifetime ban from Major League Baseball for gambling on his own games. Rose is omitted for consideration for the NBHF, however he is an inductee at the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum (RHFM) in Cincinnati, Ohio where he was a star player. Major League Baseball and the Office of the Commissioner are the authorising agents for both halls of fame and appear to support both perspectives. This research note explores the different approaches to Pete Rose at the NBHF and the RHFM. We consider the potential for dissonant narratives to be used as a management tool by the authorising agent in order to gauge public opinion and assuage Rose's fans whilst keeping the debate firmly in the public eye.

Keywords: Baseball, Heritage Tourism, Pete Rose, Museum, Dissonance

### **Introduction**

As Timothy (1997) and Timothy and Boyd (2006) remind us, heritage attractions exist on different scales depending on a site's fame, characteristics, and touristic demand. While sites may have global, national, local, or personal appeal, the scales are not mutually exclusive. A

devout Catholic may view visiting the Vatican as part of a personal heritage despite the site's global renown and visitation, for example. In this case, the site is still important and powerful on different scales and, as such, the scales are not necessarily in conflict despite the multiple interpretations. Although sites may share overlapping meanings, particularly between the global/national and local/personal scales, there is significant room for dissonance if the heritage is viewed and interpreted differently by various stakeholders. The extent to which dissonant or conflicting interpretations of the heritage are tolerated, managed, or suppressed – particularly by global and national agencies – will vary (Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000) although local narratives often end up conforming to global or national interpretations. However, in some cases, dissonant narratives could also be used as a management tool, whereby global/national agencies authorize and allow dissonant local/personal interpretations of a particular heritage in order to meet broader, organizational goals. The identification, control and interpretation of heritage by appointed experts is a practice that is referred to as Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006). Following this idea we aim to explore to what extent authorizing agents actually *encourage* dissonant narratives at the local/personal scale in order to meet their objectives.

This research note explores one such case where two baseball museums, one which exists at the global/national heritage scale and the other more at the local/personal heritage scale, interpret the same heritage quite differently, perhaps in part to address broader managerial and touristic goals. In this case, the source of dissonance is the troubled legacy of retired player Pete Rose, and how his past is interpreted at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York and at the (Cincinnati) Reds Hall of Fame and Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio. The notion that sporting heroes represent both tangible (e.g.: memorabilia associated with a player) and intangible (e.g.: the player's unique style of play) representations of heritage has gained

increased interest over the last decade (Gammon, 2014; Ramshaw, 2010). These often complex representations can offer conflicting narratives, where great athletic achievements are evaluated alongside behaviour outside the sporting arena, which in some cases will not affect the sports person's heritage status – but may impact upon their position in the annals of their chosen sport. Furthermore, retired athletes epitomise a form of living heritage that many fans are willing to pay to see, primarily to get closer to their heroes and listen, first-hand, to the anecdotes of the athlete's playing careers.

For baseball aficionados, Pete Rose exemplifies such reputational tensions. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest baseball players of all time, becoming the all-time Major League Baseball (MLB) leader in hits with 4,256 (a total widely viewed as unbreakable) over his 23-year career, the majority of which was with the Cincinnati Reds. He was also born-and-raised in Cincinnati, which helps cast him as a local legend in the community to this day. However, he was found to have gambled on baseball games he was involved in both as a player and, later, as a club manager, and was subsequently banned from Major League Baseball (Kennedy, 2014). Since his retirement and subsequent ban from MLB, he has become a fixture on the sports memorabilia circuit, where he has a reputation for being both gregarious, often sharing memories of particular games and players with autograph-seekers, while also acting in uncouth and unmannered ways, including saying quite vulgar comments in front of people of all-ages (Kennedy, 2014). Rose also served time in prison in 1990-91 for income tax evasion, largely from underreporting income derived from autograph appearances. He was also a member of the Cincinnati Reds television broadcasting crew for Fox Sports, however in 2017 Rose was accused of statutory rape for having a sexual relationship with a minor in the 1970s (Pilcher & Clark, 2017) and was fired from his broadcasting job.

Both the National Baseball Hall of Fame and the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum have the same authorizing agents, Major League Baseball and the Office of the Commissioner, though each museum interprets Rose's legacy quite differently. Rose's accomplishments are included in the museum galleries of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and his ban from baseball is discussed by gallery guides and forms the interactive display in one of the galleries. However, due to Rose's ban from Major League Baseball, his name has never been included on the Hall of Fame ballot and, as a result, he can never be voted into the Hall of Fame. On the other hand, in the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum, Rose *is* included in the team's Hall of Fame, has numerous displays in his honour throughout the museum and throughout the adjacent grounds, while his gambling issues and ban are not part of the narrative of the interpretive displays or gallery guides. The discrepancy between the two museums is quite jarring in terms of their interpretation of Rose and his role in the sport's heritage. However, the dissonant narratives may actually serve two important managerial purposes, specifically to demark roles and responsibilities between the global/national site and the local/personal site, including balancing both an authentic portrayal of baseball's heritage as well as incorporating contemporary considerations of how – and by whom – baseball's heritage is interpreted, as well as addressing audience expectations considerations at each of the sites, which may range from veneration to condemnation.

### **The Hit King: Pete Rose**

Kennedy (2014) argues that Pete Rose is “a figure who stirs uncommon passion, righteousness, indignation (and) remains the subject of perhaps the most polarizing and provocative question in sports: Does Pete Rose belong in the Hall of Fame?” (pp.1-2). Rose was born in Cincinnati and played for the Cincinnati Reds from 1963-78, during which he won numerous awards (including

baseball's Most Valuable Player award in 1975) as well as two World Series championships. He also earned the nickname "Charlie Hustle" for his intensity on the baseball field, exemplified by his collision with catcher Ray Fosse at home plate at the 1970 All Star Game (an exhibition match featuring baseball's top players) (Messner, 1992). He later played for the Philadelphia Phillies and Montreal Expos before returning to the Reds as a player/manager in 1984. He retired as a player in 1986 though remained as the Reds manager through 1989. His most notable on-field achievement was breaking Ty Cobb's career hits record of 4,191 in September 1985. Rose retired with 4,256 hits, a record unlikely to ever be eclipsed.

Rose's on-field accomplishments place him amongst some of the greatest baseball players of all time. However, it is his off-field issues for which he might be best known. Most notably, Rose gambled on baseball games in which he was a participant (either as a player or manager). For this major transgression of baseball's rules and codes of conduct, which may have impacted the outcomes of numerous baseball games, Rose was given a lifetime ban from baseball – including induction into the NBHF (Reston Jr., 1997). Rose also went to prison in 1990 for income tax evasion and was accused of statutory rape in 2017. Rose was inducted into the RMHF in 2016, although he remains ineligible for induction into the NBHF.

## **Methods**

This case study employed three data sources from Yin's (1994) case study method: interviews (Veal, 2006) textual/material analysis (Slater, 2006), and observations and field notes (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), "using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings" (p. 306). Visitation to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum took place over a five-day period in January 2018 while visitation to the Reds Hall of Fame and

Museum took place over a two-day period in June 2018. Interviews were informal discussions with seven gallery and museum guides (five at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and two at the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum) over the two visits. Interview notes were taken and guides were informed of the research intent of the study. Given that the interviews were informal, discussions touched on a number of different topics and themes at each of the museums and were therefore not solely about Pete Rose. These discussions helped to contextualize and comprehend the interpretations in the exhibits and displays at each of the museums, as well as understand both the guides' personal approaches to interpreting Pete Rose (including whether they were given permission to discuss Rose, or any direction about how these discussions should proceed with visitors) and how they understood each museum's approach to interpreting Rose's history and legacy. Textual-material analysis included museum promotional material, including websites and social media postings, as well as photographing and comparing museum displays and texts related to Pete Rose at each of the museums. Analyses of these texts helped to inform and compare observations and interview data (Silverman, 2001) as well as compare how each museum approached interpreting Pete Rose. Observations and field notes were also used, and included descriptions of museum spaces and exhibits in their entirety, and themes and impressions of the museum's collections (Bailey, 2007). Observations of patrons did not occur at either museum. Data from this study was coded manually. Open coding, using Microsoft Word and coloured flags on data sources, grouped the data into manageable segments. Following the open coding, themes were developed for analysis and informed more focused coding of the data (Bailey, 2007). Coding and analysis of the data took place in July 2018. Three major themes emerged from the data: representations of Pete Rose, Pete Rose and baseball history, and honouring Pete Rose.

### **Pete Rose at the National Baseball Hall of Fame**

Opened in 1939, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York (NBHF) is one of the most well-known sports museums in the world and has long been a place of pilgrimage for baseball fans from around the globe (Fyfe, 2008). The Hall of Fame has an annual attendance of just under 300,000 visitors (Bloom, 2018), a significant number given the Hall of Fame's geographical location in rural Upstate New York<sup>1</sup>, which is a considerable distance from major population centers and airports. The NBHF can be viewed as having two primary public sections: the museum, which tells the history of the sport, its development, its significant moments and players from its beginnings to present day, and the hall of fame, which is a shrine celebrating baseball's greatest figures. The acknowledgement and induction of a player into any national hall of fame not only validates their sporting achievements but also escalates them to a status that separates them from the rest. Hall of famers are assured a sporting immortality, whilst being accorded a level of respect that borders on religious devotion. As a result many halls of fame take on the mantle of sacred shrine, which undoubtedly influences how they are managed and consumed. (Gammon, 2004)

Whilst Pete Rose is yet to be inducted himself, both his accomplishments and digressions, form part of the Hall of Fame's museum wing, including sections which provide for public discussion and debate about his legacy. Artefacts related to his record for most hits are displayed in the museum alongside artefacts from Ty Cobb, who held the hits record until Rose broke it at Riverfront Stadium Cincinnati in 1985 (Figure 1). Rose was also part of a Cincinnati Reds club,

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<sup>1</sup> Baseball was once thought to have been invented in Cooperstown by Abner Doubleday in 1839. Although the Doubleday story has long been debunked, the symbolic and mythical association between baseball's heritage and Cooperstown remains. For a more detailed discussion, see Chafetz (2009)



nicknamed the “Big Red Machine”, that dominated baseball in the 1970s and, as such, there are artefacts from that team and era including some from Rose.

*Figure 1 – Display case honouring Pete Rose’s hit record at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Photo by (Removed for Review)*

However, Rose’s gambling issues – and subsequent ban from Major League Baseball and the Hall of Fame – are also part of the museum’s interpretation. Part of the “Whole New Ballgame” section of the museum, which covers 1970-present, includes several touch screens that allow visitors to weigh-in on contentious issues in baseball, as well as read the opinions of others. While some of the interactive panels are related to controversies around particular rules, such as the use of the Designated Hitter in the American League, others specifically seek opinions about more controversial issues including labour in baseball, the inclusion of players into the Hall of Fame who used or are suspected of using Performance Enhancing Drugs during their baseball careers, and whether Pete Rose’s lifetime suspension ought to be overturned thus allowing him to be voted into the Hall of Fame (Figure 2). At the time of the research, visitors’ sentiment as expressed through the interactive panel were overwhelmingly in favour of reinstating Rose. Museum guides were also allowed by Hall of Fame management to discuss controversial issues in baseball, including providing their own opinions. While issues such as Performance Enhancing Drugs in baseball divided guides, five different guides over a one-week period in January 2018 said that Rose’s suspension ought to be overturned, with two guides suggesting that it will likely be overturned after Rose dies, allowing him to be inducted into the Hall of Fame posthumously. The reason, the guides suggested, for the posthumous induction was

two-fold: first, semantically, Rose’s “lifetime ban” would end when he died and, second, that Major League Baseball did not want to give Rose the satisfaction of induction during his lifetime. In any event, though Rose’s role in the history of baseball is acknowledged at the Hall of Fame, his legacy as an eternal member of the Hall of Fame remains complex, a fact that the Hall of Fame itself acknowledges through its interpretation (Kelly, 2018).

*Figure 2 – Interactive panel at the National Baseball Hall of Fame which solicits and records the views of visitors about Pete Rose and his ban from baseball. Photo by (removed for review)*

### **Pete Rose at the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum**

The Reds Hall of Fame and Museum (RHF<sup>2</sup>M), opened in 2004 and is situated adjacent to the team’s home stadium (The Great American Ballpark) in downtown Cincinnati. The RHF<sup>2</sup>M attracts between 70,000-80,000 visitors per year – a number which depends on the on-field performance of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team (M. Harlow, Ticket Operations Manager, personal communication, September 5, 2018). The site features two levels of exhibits, a theatre, and a team hall of fame. Representations of Pete Rose are prominent throughout the museum, including a specific film about Rose, a wall of baseballs representing each hit in Rose’s career, an outdoor “Rose Garden” attached to the museum which includes one white rose representing the exact location in Riverfront Stadium<sup>2</sup> of where the baseball landed for his record-breaking hit, and a plaque in the team’s hall of fame (Figure 3).

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<sup>2</sup> The Great American Ballpark replaced Riverfront Stadium in 2003. Much of the space surrounding The Great American Ballpark was once part of Riverfront Stadium, including where the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum now stands.

*Figure 3 – Pete Rose plaque in the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum. The inscription includes Rose’s nickname, “Charlie Hustle”, in reference to his dogged determination when he played.*

*Photo by (removed for review)*

Unlike the debate about Rose and his legacy at the NBHF, there is no controversy at the RHF: Rose is a hero, a local boy who made it to the top of his sport through hard work and determination. The only explicit mention of his off-field issues is on a poem on the side of the museum (Figure 4), which mentions the “knotted history” of Rose, but sets a defiant tone in praising his accomplishments which include his hard playing style on the bases (which earned him the nickname “Charlie Hustle”), his propensity to slide headfirst into bases to avoid tags (making him more susceptible to injury), as well as hit record for most hits (the reference to “The Hit King”):

*You taught me*

*To avoid the tag,*

*To sing*

*The knotted history of*

*The Hit King*

*With a stubborn tongue.*

*To slide*

*Head-first*

*Into home.*

Discussions with museum guides confirm that he is considered a hero amongst local residents and fans, and that he deserves his place in the NBHF. The guides also repeated the impression

raised at the NBHF that Rose would be inducted posthumously. Guides further added that although Rose was always included in the historical exhibits, he was only added to the RHF in 2016 after the museum received permission from Major League Baseball and the Office of the Commissioner (Associated Press, 2016).

*Figure 4 – Poem on the side of the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum in Cincinnati which defiantly celebrates Pete Rose. Photo by (removed for review)*

## **Discussion**

Major League Baseball and the Office of the Commissioner are the authorizing agents for both the NBHF and the RHF. While it is unlikely that they are involved in the minutiae of the exhibits in either museum, representations of such a divisive figure like Rose would have to have had explicit approval from the Office of the Commissioner and Major League Baseball. The fact that the authorizing agents would approve very different narratives at each museum suggests a purposeful managerial intent related to the scale of each museum, as well as the audience at each of the sites. As a museum with global and national responsibilities, the NBHF— through Major League Baseball and the Office of the Commissioner – have a role to protect the sport’s past, something to which Rose’s tarnished legacy complicates. However, through honouring Rose on the local level at the RHF, Major League Baseball is seeming to use the smaller, local museum as a test case or trial balloon for the NBHF. In this, Major League Baseball is provided a sense of the public’s acceptance of Rose as Hall of Fame material, while also acknowledging to fans of the Cincinnati Reds that, despite his issues, Rose is an important part of the team’s history and heritage. Furthermore, if there was negative public reaction to Rose’s inclusion in the RHF,

then the burden of inclusion remains at the local level and it becomes a local heritage issue rather than a national one.

Of course each hall of fame in this study has its own mission and responsibilities. The NBHF is meant to expound to a global audience a carefully measured, objective view of the game and its players, while the RHF exists to specifically honour the on-field accomplishments of the players and the teams associated with a specific club. It would be overly simplistic to conclude that the differences between the two institutions is that one takes a more objective stance, whereas the other assumes a subjective approach to their decisions – for there is more to it than this. One of the key differences is that the RHF explicitly details that the *raison d'être* of their operation is to honour *on-field* accomplishments, as opposed to the NBHF who additionally consider the character of the athletes in and outside of the game. In terms of Rose's gambling habits, these could be considered both on-and-off field issues, though it appears that the interpretation that the RHF espouses is that gambling was strictly an off-field issue. Nevertheless, as indicated above, the fact that the sport's key stakeholders would sanction and so implicitly support Rose's induction in Cincinnati's hall of fame is notable.

Unsurprisingly, the shrine-like qualities of sports halls of fame have led many commentators to equate them in quasi-religious terms (Gammon, 2004; Redmond, 1973; Snyder, 1991). Clearly, when athletes are inducted into a sports hall of fame, a secularised sanctification takes place – a process that has parallels with the determination of shrines and saints in the Catholic Church. However, unlike the Vatican's absolute authority in such decisions, it appears that peripheral halls of fame can (to a degree) enshrine whomever they wish – albeit with the support (or, perhaps, without the opposition) of the necessary governing bodies. The result can either be viewed as a two-tiered system (akin to *cultus confirmation* and sainthood), which could

potentially generate some confusion amongst the baseball fraternity, or that it offers a processual policy (similar to beatification) that gradually leads to an accepted Hall of Famer. It also leaves room for tacit acknowledgement of local sentiment which may not necessarily be in the interest of the national/global institution as a whole. But, accession of Rose to the NBHF is by no means guaranteed, within or beyond his lifetime. For redemption to meaningfully take place there must be evidence of sincere contrition by the player; something that Rose took nearly 20 years to do. And even if the apology is recognised and accepted by the key stakeholders, this does not mean that all is forgotten or forgiven. Players gambling on games has always been considered an indiscretion too far for the key administrators of the sport – as illustrated by Shoeless Joe Jackson's continued exclusion from the NBHF over 90 years ago. For those unfamiliar with Baseball, Jackson is part of the game's lore. He was an exceptional and much admired player during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was caught up in the Black Sox scandal which found that some players (Including Jackson) had taken money to throw the World Series. Even though Jackson's guilt is inconclusive, banishment from any post career honours are still in place.

Visitor expectations to each of the museums also plays a role. Although Kennedy (2014) suggests that part of Rose's appeal is that he is an outsider and a maverick – much of Rose's post-career income has come from the memorabilia market, based on the fact he's the greatest baseball player *not* in the Hall of Fame – this interpretation of him is probably more based on sympathetic characterizations of him, primarily from those who have fond associations of him from his time with the Cincinnati Reds. Similarly, it will be Cincinnati Reds fans who will have personal memories and nostalgia about Rose, and perhaps use the vehicle of the RHF to share those memories with friends and family. For the NBHF, debates about who ought to be included in the Hall of Fame is part of the appeal of the museum (Chafets, 2009) and while the inclusion

of Rose into the Hall of Fame may have some touristic impact at induction weekend (when Reds fans and supporters of Rose may come to Cooperstown), there may be members of the public – as well as supporters and honoured members of the NBHF – who feel strongly that Rose should not be honoured and, therefore, may pull their support. In short, the audience for a local heritage attraction like the RHF<sub>M</sub> may have different expectations than if they were visiting the NBHF, which has a decidedly more national/international mandate. The RHF<sub>M</sub> is similarly aided in their interpretation by Rose in the fact that the Reds team is not a global brand. Whether a team museum for a widely-supported international team like the New York Yankees could include dissonant narratives in their team museum is something to consider vis-à-vis the scales of heritage.

Rose remains a hero to many, but his position in the annals of the game is yet unresolved. He is in a kind of heritage limbo, where contrasting designations from the two halls of fame discussed above suggest either a mellowing by the key stakeholders towards Rose's indiscretions, or as an acknowledgement of his achievements – but only at a local level. Either way, such apparent dissonance helps keep the debate alive, which potentially has positive commercial implications for both halls of fame. For the RHF<sub>M</sub>, it is a bold statement to the Reds' fans that Rose is worthy of a place in a hall of fame – albeit one that is limited to one team. The notion that the RHF<sub>M</sub> is being used as a test case in which to ascertain public opinion is, as yet, unclear given that Rose has yet to be included into the NBHF nor has there been any present indication that his inclusion is imminent. But such acquiescence by the authorising bodies may serve another purpose: that Rose's induction to the RHF<sub>M</sub> will, over time, desensitize even the most ardent objector.

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