

MLB Winter Meetings

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Jeff Kent

Josh Rawitch

Jon Shestakofsky

Hall of Fame Press Conference

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jon Shestakofsky, Vice President of Communications and Content for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown. Welcome to the Hall of Fame's Contemporary Baseball Era Committee introductory news conference.

Joining me on the dais are Josh Rawitch, President of the National Baseball Hall of Fame; the newest member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Jeff Kent; and the Chairman of the Board of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Jane Forbes Clark. We're also thrilled today to have Jeff's lovely wife Dana joining us.

With that, I'll ask Josh to step to the podium for some opening remarks.

JOSH RAWITCH: Thank you so much for being here today. As you know, the National Baseball Hall of Fame 16-member Contemporary Baseball Era Committee met yesterday to consider eight player candidates for Hall of Fame election whose greatest contributions came after 1980. The ballot was selected by an 11-member Historical Overview Committee for the Baseball Writers' Association of America. On behalf of Jane Forbes Clark and the Board of Directors of the Hall of Fame, we'd like to thank both of those committees for their thoughtful work.

You heard the results last night on MLB Network, and the Contemporary Baseball Era Committee elected Jeff Kent to one of baseball's most elite fraternities.

Over the course of a remarkable 17-year career, Jeff established himself as one of the most productive players at his position in the game's history. With a dozen 20-plus homer seasons and eight seasons of 100 or more runs driven in, his career total of 377 home runs is the most ever by a second baseman, and his 1,518 RBIs are the most of any second baseman whose career began in the live ball era.



2025 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS ORLANDO

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His six seasons in San Francisco included an MVP effort in 2000, in which he batted .334 with 33 homers, 125 runs batted in, and a 1,021 OPS, and an outstanding 2002 season that helped drive the Giants to the National League pennant.

He earned five All-Star selections and four Silver Slugger awards across a career that also impacted the Toronto Blue Jays, New York Mets, Cleveland Indians, Houston Astros, and Los Angeles Dodgers. Now he joins the baseball Hall of Fame team and our class of 2026. Congratulations, Jeff Kent.

(Applause.)

We are all very much looking forward to our induction ceremony in Cooperstown on Sunday, July 26, 2026. Where Jeff will be celebrated along with any electees who emerge from the Baseball Writers' Association of America voting, which will be announced on January 20th also right here on MLB Network live from the Plaque Gallery in Cooperstown.

Now I would please ask you to stand, Jeff, and put on your new team jersey and team cap.

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: And before we open for questions, love to ask Jeff if he wants to make a few opening remarks as well.

JEFF KENT: It's been a while. This is an overwhelming moment. It has been a whirlwind. I'll try not to get too deep because tears will start coming out again. I cried when I retired, and now I have to re-cry again when I come back.

The game has always been a beautiful game. I played it with passion. I played it with integrity. I loved every minute that I played the game. Grateful to the Hall of Fame for the consideration. Grateful for the voters that considered and argued through and debated through my career, and so grateful that I was recognized.

I still can't believe guys like Alan Trammell, who I had lunch

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with today, that I'm included in guys with that name that somehow, some way my name can be in the same line as those great players before me. This is just an unbelievable moment. Thank you.

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: That's great, Jeff. Thank you so much. We're now ready to take questions.

Q. Jeff, congrats again. You spoke last night that you implied that you would like to go in as a Giant obviously where you had your most success, in terms of the plaque, even though it's Hall of Fame ultimate decision. Could you envision yourself being here today if Brian Sabean didn't trade for you from Cleveland because you spoke about your relationship with Dusty Baker, how he turned around your career. You had a new set of teammates. You played with Barry Bonds. Would you have been here today if you weren't a Giant?

JEFF KENT: No, I would not be here. That was the turning point in my career. I had learned a lot through my time with the New York Mets. Dallas Green was a guy that taught me how to be more of a professional baseball player. When I got to San Francisco, Dusty Baker lit a fire under me to be better. Not just to achieve just this normal standard, but to achieve more. I think Dusty was a guy that really understood how to get the best out of his players, and I think he knew that I had more to give. He fired that up.

I made some physical changes when I got to San Francisco. The biggest one is -- I wish kids would learn how to do more often -- but go the other way. I learned how to go with the pitch. Give the pitcher some credit. If he wants to throw the ball away, hit it away. Those were some physical adjustments I made, but absolutely, I would not be here without the Giants.

Q. You obviously talked a little bit about Dusty and some of the other people in San Francisco that meant a lot to you. Have you had a chance to talk to Dusty or Brian Sabean? Have you heard from anyone in San Francisco or Giants fans?

JEFF KENT: Some of you guys made the inside joke. Brian Sabean was not an idiot back in the day, if you know that -- when he traded for me, Nick Sabean and Ned Colletti were there and they took a risk on me and José Vizcaíno, and that was a tag.

Sabeen that first year had pulled together six or seven trades and signees to create that team that was a pretty good first-year team.

I have not exchanged messages with those guys. I did exchange some texts with Dusty, and I have over the years. We chat every now and then. My son still plays. So we'll pop off about each other's kids every now and then. And I'll get a chance to do that after I get through these 200 text messages that I have on my phone, which I haven't done yet.

But there's so many people involved in my career and the progress of it. And I considered it a progress. I think I still played when I was 40 years old in LA. I didn't know it at the time that I was one of the oldest guys to ever play for the Dodgers, Opening Day.

But I felt like my life was a progress. It started out kind of slow, but it progressed and had some meat in the middle and still had some legs at the end. So I'm grateful for so many people that I can't mention now that were involved.

But those guys were -- we talked about Dusty a minute ago, but Sabean took a chance, and I can claim he wasn't an idiot.

Q. 17 seasons, six different teams, any managers besides Dusty Baker that you would like to thank on this journey?

JEFF KENT: Yeah, I told the story earlier today about Dallas Green. I know he's passed. He was a big influence. I remember when I was with the Mets, he had come in to turn the team around. Our manager, Torborg, had gotten fired, and Dallas Green came in with his 1952 spikes. I've got to believe they were that old. He walked around the locker room just chewing us out for about two hours. He had quotes and quotes.

What's been pinned in my brain is a quote that I'll never forget that he mentioned was "head and heart." "Play with your head and your heart." And "no excuses, zero excuses."

That kind of molded me and prepared me to get to a guy like Dusty. But I'd say Dallas Green, absolutely, was a guy that set the stage for my career to start taking off, but I needed a guy like Dusty to help me pull it all together.

Q. I cover the New York Yankees. Your son is in the minor leagues with them now. What scouting report do you give on your son?

JEFF KENT: Would I give him about him?

Q. Yes.

JEFF KENT: Well, he can't be as good as me. (Laughter.)



We fight like that all the time. He's always ripping on me. One thing that he -- you're getting me to talk about my kids -- he always thought he could be better than me because he's always said, "Dad, you're not in the Hall of Fame." So after your call, I hugged him and said, "Good luck." (Laughter).

But the scouting report is, I tried to teach him a lot of what I failed at early in my career, which is to go the other way. I didn't want him to be a power guy. And one of the knocks that he had before he got drafted by the Yankees, he didn't have a lot of power. And he was talked about out of high school, too, a lot of doubles but no power.

I said, there's a reason why -- I was in the background trying not to be his agent -- I was saying, there's a reason he doesn't have power. Trust me, trust me. He'll have power. But the other thing is he can go on the other way, go with the ball. He's a little stubborn right now because he wants to be a Big Leaguer because he's with the Yankees.

That would be the scouting report. He can take the ball, keep his hands inside the ball and go to all fields. And he's not intimidated. He's got a little prick like me, but he's a lot like his mother sitting right here, too. So, there's some good in him not just all the bad.

Q. And also I wasn't around in San Francisco back with Sabean and all that stuff, but you were talking about Sabean wasn't an idiot. What does that mean? What do you mean by that? You said that Sabean wasn't an idiot for trading for you, what's that phraseology about?

JEFF KENT: When Brian Sabean was making some trades back in '97, the media had ripped on him because he had traded Matt Williams for Jeff Kent and Jose Vizcaino. And Matt Williams was, rightfully so, a poster boy for the San Francisco Giants, had great years.

And the media called him an idiot. And his comment back was, I'm not an idiot. Just wait, just watch.

It wasn't solely about me but he had made other trades that was a combination of that good team that he put together. That was the beginning of the Giants turning the table and creating the, at the time a dynasty. And ultimately we missed out, Game 7 losers in the World Series, but ultimately propelling the Giants to win three World Series rings, thanks to a guy that's sitting back there in Buster Posey.

Q. I want to take you back to '92 when you got traded

from the Blue Jays to the Mets. You're a young player, started establishing yourself with the Blue Jays. How did you process the trade at the time, and what did you think after the Blue Jays went on that postseason run afterwards?

JEFF KENT: I was absolutely disappointed I was traded in '92 because Dave Winfield had taken me under his wing and I was the only rookie on the team and all those awesome players on the '92 Blue Jays team were great to me. And I was the utility player for that team. I did everything from catching bullpens to warming up guys. Warming up Tom Henke in the ninth inning was one of the worst things I've ever had to do in my life as a baseball player, to being a batboy, to Roberto Alomar hitting his head on the wall in the bathroom so he couldn't go out in the sixth inning, so they yell at me to go out and play second base. That was a great experience.

They traded me for David Cone. And honestly, I had no idea what the National League was all about. I had the wife go get me a newspaper downstairs, and Cito Gaston called me and said you're being traded to the Mets: You better pack your bags because they want you there tomorrow to play -- which tomorrow was the same day.

That was part of the turning point for me to play every day because I didn't in '92, and I got 86 games in with the Blue Jays that year. And I was ultimately grateful that people even knew who I was, that I could be traded for a guy like Cony. What a great player he was. And he was the one of the pieces that helped them win the World Series in '92.

But I'm grateful that people recognized me and knew that I could do something. And the Mets did at that time, and that allowed me to be a starter every day.

Q. You mentioned that willingness to do a bit of everything. How did that factor into your reflection on the opportunity, because Kelly Gruber was there, Alomar was there -- they had a lot of pieces in place? There wasn't a clear pathway to playing time there for you?

JEFF KENT: I think I get the gist of your question. I couldn't quite hear you. But the pathway for me to play every day was something I always wanted. I thought I was better than just a utility player. I wasn't a natural second baseman. The Blue Jays taught me how to play second base before they traded for Alomar. And that blocked me off from getting in the big leagues.

I was a big guy that had a little power, so they thought I was a third baseman. And Gruber signed a big deal there. I was trying to find a way but everybody else was



controlling that way. I didn't really have anything to do with it.

Grateful that the Mets took a shot on me. They wrote a book, "The Worst Team Money Can Buy" in '92, and I happened to say I'm part of that book -- or sad to say I'm part of that book.

But it was a great experience for me to understand that the game is way bigger than me, and I've got to roll with the punches. And I did and had, I thought, were about four and a half good years in New York before I was traded away for a bad trade, by the way. (Laughter.)

I was traded for -- you may not have questions; I'll answer. I was traded three times for some big players. Cony, my first trade; Carlos Baerga; and then Matt Williams. And I was part of all three of those trades. Those were big trades during my whole almost 20-year career.

Q. Jeff, could you see yourself being -- assuming maybe a role in the organization to some degree? You used to come down to Spring Training and then they stopped doing that, then Buster brought that back, kind of embraced the former guys in Spring Training to be part of the learning process for the younger players. Do you see yourself or could you see yourself in a role like that? Would you like to be more involved in the organization?

JEFF KENT: First, I'm a dad. And right now, the dad's wearing a Yankee hat. So I don't know if San Francisco will let me wear -- Posey, can I wear a Yankee hat during Spring Training? (Laughter.)

San Francisco has got some great people. And you know, I loved it. I loved everything I did there. I went to Berkeley. I knew the Bay Area well. I grew up in California, even though it was Southern California. I had a good time going back to San Francisco and working with the kids there.

That era has changed now. Since I'm so far away, I've been chasing my own kid, training him and teaching him. And now I'm stuck chasing four grandkids. So it's going to be hard for me to get on an airplane. But you can ask my wife that when you're done, because I don't think that's going to go over very well.

Q. Since the Giants moved west, I believe they've had five players who spent most of their career in San Francisco or spent the best part of their career in San Francisco, who became hall of famers -- Mays, McCovey, Cepeda, Perry, Marichal -- and now Jeff Kent. What do you think when you hear that? How does that sound?

JEFF KENT: I saw Marichal again. As I mentioned in my opening, there's no way -- there's no way you can see -- there's no way that I can -- see, I'm a mechanical guy and science too, mechanical and science -- see, I can't control my emotions, so I'm not an emotional guy, but I guess I am -- is there's no way in the world that you can write my name down and pin it next to those types of names. It doesn't calculate with the people. And I'm a guy that wants to calculate things.

Still to this day, 24 hours now, there's no way. Maybe I'll get there. Maybe. But I know the things that I did over my career matter. That's why I cried at my retirement because I love the game so much.

And I'm grateful for people that recognized it, argued it, thought that I was good enough to be pinned with those guys. I guess a lot of gratitude. I don't know if that answers your question, but you've got some tears out of me. Good job. (Laughter.)

Q. You sit there today in that jersey and that cap and having achieved pretty much everything a ball player could hope to achieve and a career. But you also hold the key to one of the fun mysteries of baseball over the last 20 years. What happened to the truck? Can you tell us now?

JEFF KENT: The truck?

Q. Can you tell us now?

JEFF KENT: Well, that will die with me, but what you think happened, there's some truth to it. And what did happen, what I said happened, there's some truth to that. I don't know how to color the story any better. But I get beat up by my wife and my kids about that story all the time. Maybe that answers your question.

But I was ready to play Opening Day. I got put on the DL, so I missed it. There's a little bitterness on my end about that one too, but that's all right. That's a tough question. You got me off guard there.

Q. You spent most of your years with the Giants but in your last four seasons were with the Dodgers. You had an All-Star season, hit 73 home runs. What do you remember the most with your time LA, and would you be here without that stretched to end your career there?

JEFF KENT: LA was great. I didn't think I was going to play that long. I thought I was going to play Houston, play a couple years, try to sign as a free agent play for a couple



more years, and it didn't happen.

And DePodesta with LA had signed me to play, and it was a great opportunity because I was going back home. I grew up in Southern California. I bought front row tickets for my parents to come to the games every day and watch me play.

Two years led to four years in LA, and it was Southern California, great weather, good fans. I got to go home where I grew up a few times. Maybe that's why I played until I was 40.

Not a lot of people know the story, but my brain had -- I lost my brain and there were some players that had told me that your physicality may not get you out of the game but your brain is going to do that.

And I remember a moment, sad to say because I was a professional, is I'm playing second base in LA. A guy hits a ball -- I don't remember who hit it -- a guy hits a ball to right field, and I never saw the ball. I'm looking at home plate. I'm jumping. And he hit the ball and I hear it hit and I didn't see it, and I had no idea what was going on.

I look at my teammates and they're all going out towards right field. So I run out to right field and catch the ball from the outfielder, and it was no big deal. And I never saw the ball.

And I knew at that moment, I was done. My brain was gone. I couldn't focus anymore. I wasn't crying at that moment as I am now. But I knew that that was it for me. And that never happened again. But that was a great cap, that was a great cap to the end of my career.

I got to play for Torre, a great manager in Joe Torre, and got to finish out with Nomar Garciaparra, who was there too. I played with him a little bit. And I got to play with Maddux and Orel Hershisier, guys that I watched play, guys that frustrated the hell out of me in Maddux, and just realized that there was nothing else I needed to do. Hopefully that answers your question.

Q. When we see guys who have, let's call them, an intense playing personality on the field, sometimes on the outside we go, how much does he enjoy it? When you play for 20 years, and maybe it was an edge and there were guys who have said I need to play with an edge, can you just talk about the enjoyment of the game? I don't think we actually hear guys talk about that enough, about how much you enjoyed the fun, is a word that sort of doesn't get brought up a lot. Can you just talk about the fun and the enjoyment you got out of the game? Can you talk about the fun and

enjoyment of baseball, because sometimes we hear guys say, he's just intense, but there's got to be the other part that maybe we don't talk about or see.

JEFF KENT: Thanks for coloring that for me, but I think a lot of times throughout my career, people thought I took the game too serious at times. And I processed -- and there are a lot of times -- I made a quote to myself that there were a lot of things that I had done because I didn't want people -- it was cliché -- but I didn't want people to get into my house, I didn't want people to get in my brain because I wanted to focus on the game. I took the game too serious. I didn't have too much fun on the field.

But I did in a sense that the game -- I always looked at the game -- I'm a half-empty guy. I'm not a half-full guy. I'm a half-empty guy. I'm always looking for the problems. I always want to fix the problems. Can't get a hit today. Why didn't you get a hit? You got three hits, should be happy you got three out of four hits. I wasn't happy. Why did I not get that fourth hit? If I made an error, why did I make that error? Cost a run. Still made an error. Why did I make that error?

So for me, growing up -- my dad was a police officer, fairly strict in our family -- for me, that was fun. And it may not be fun, jovial, laugh and stuff. Sometimes we had that in the locker room, and sometimes people called me not a very good teammate because I didn't have a lot of fun in the locker rooms and go out and hang out with the boys, but fun for me was trying to solve that math problem that was almost unsolvable. And that was the challenge that I think that brought me back every year and allowed me to be consistent, especially in my MVP year when everybody in the stands is voting, running their mouths, MVP, and you try to block that out, and people used to say, just have fun. Well, for me, fun didn't come first. Winning came first, and if you then won, then you could have fun.

I was telling my wife on the way over here that this election in the Hall of Fame is it; I'm done. And I said, but there's still a piece missing. And a couple of you guys out here, especially Posey has experienced this more than a couple times, is I missed out on the one opportunity of the most fun ever, which is sitting on the floor in the locker room after you just won the last game of the season, which is the World Series. When you're done throwing the champagne on everybody and you're done bragging about everything, done doing the interviews and you're just filthy and dirty and wet and you just sit on the floor and have this moment of completeness, that has to be the ultimate fun, I never got to experience that, and I missed that.

But along the way, did I have fun? Yeah, but I still feel a little incomplete. But today, there's no more. That's it.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

This is it. I am done. So maybe I'll have fun tomorrow, I don't know if this answers your question, but that's how my twisted brain works. But that's all I've got for you.

Q. With the system that you went through in having to have to wait for the writers not voting for you, now you see the committee voting you in, do you feel good about the fact that this system, this baseball system finally worked, and you got what was due you?

JEFF KENT: We, as athletes -- especially me as a baseball player, I don't think I'm due anything. But to answer your question specifically, I think, for me, yesterday, talking about this with my wife -- that was the hardest moment to get through, which is, I really think this is more valuable to me. Not to discredit the media. I know I've rubbed you guys the wrong way a lot and often, but it was -- we didn't play for the media. We played for the fans. We played against each other as teammates. We played for the owners of those organizations because it's an entertainment business.

Now, to have this panel be consisting of former players that I necessarily didn't play against but watched me, a few media, and then the corporate, which I call the corporate people involved in the teams, to have those people spend hours arguing about me and if I'm worthy enough to do that, it doesn't overshadow, I think, the original ballot that I was on for 10 years.

But personally, those are the people that I played for, the legacy that guys like Alan Trammell left, Ryne Sandberg, who is not here, that you try to carry on the tradition or be better than them because they set the standard, which was pretty high, Ryan Sandberg was probably the guy because he was a second baseman that I wanted to be better than because that's just our competitive nature. You play for those guys. You don't want to disappoint those guys. You want to carry on this game that's given back so much to me.

So to have those people ultimately vote for me and acknowledge the things that I did was the worst part about the last 24 hours.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Jeff, thanks for sharing those thoughts. Thanks, everyone, for joining us as we honor the newest member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Jeff Kent will be --

(Applause)

Jeff will be formally inducted into the Hall of Fame on Sunday, July 26 in Cooperstown along with any electees that emerge from the BBWAA balloting. Those results will

be announced on MLB Network on January 20th. We hope to see you all at the induction. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

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