

## Roger Clemens' Out Pitch

When Roger Clemens' agent Randy Hendricks dropped a doorstopper of a report yesterday attributing the Rocket's longevity to adjustments in pitching style and conditioning—and not performance enhancing drugs—he made it clear that Clemens intends to fight to the bitter end against allegations made by his former trainer, Brian McNamee, that he used steroids and human growth hormones during his time with the Blue Jays and Yankees. In doing so, Hendricks also ended any chance that we would ever find resolution to the controversy surrounding his client.

Whether or not Clemens did use steroids is beside the point. I tend to take the same view as Salon's King Kaufman on athletes' use of drugs, that [it's their nickel](#). Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds and Marion Jones aren't stupid; they knew the possible risks and rewards of using steroids, and if they did, they're responsible for the consequences (and if you want to take personal liability a step further, they're also entitled to whatever personal satisfaction they take from any gains). If one more athlete, in an era already inundated with steroid abuse, turns out to be on the juice, so it goes. I'm past being shocked or saddened. But what Clemens has done by responding so aggressively to McNamee's charges has pretty much sealed his fate for the people who do care about such things.

When looking for answers to difficult problems, I like to apply a principle I learned from an old history professor called [Occam's Razor](#). In a nutshell, it says that all things considered, the simplest explanation is usually the best. Which is a simpler explanation for Clemens' late career dominance? That, as Hendricks said in his report, it's the result of a complex calculation of reduced pitch counts, new pitches, less rigorous travel requirements, and shortened seasons? Or that in 1997, at 34 years old with a .500 record over the past four seasons, spurned by his old team and relegated to pitching in the indifference of Toronto, he acceded to a willing trainer's offer to rejuvenate his career with drugs? To me, and I suspect to a lot of people who have never heard of Occam's Razor, McNamee's version of the story is by far the easiest to swallow.

But what is Clemens to do? He clearly has much to lose, first and foremost a plaque in Cooperstown someday. It makes sense that he wants to defend his honor. But consider the relative pass given to other high-profile players linked to steroids who took their lumps and admitted it, like Andy Pettite, Rick Ankiel, and the man who started it all, Jason Giambi. Pettite, who admitted using human growth hormone, has scarcely had his name mentioned since the Mitchell report was released. Ankiel, who also received shipments of HGH when he was struggling to recover from elbow surgery at the low point of his career, has been canonized by St. Louis fans for fessing up; if pressed, most of them would say they can't blame him for doing what it took to keep playing. Giambi, who has confessed all sorts of steroid abuse connected with the BALCO investigation, has seen his star tarnished due to a general decline in production, but has avoided the worst of the criticism leveled at world-class deniers like Clemens and Bonds.

None of the players who owned up to their past mistakes have nearly as much at stake as Clemens, but consider how far even the slightest admission of guilt would go toward clearing his name. Imagine if, like Pettite or Ankiel, he admitted to using HGH—a substance already questioned for its value as an enhancement—on McNamee's suggestion, and then refuted the rest of the claims. That one small admission of guilt would go a long way toward defending himself against the more damaging charges, because it would give Clemens the weight of humility and honesty, rather than the arrogance and anger his steadfast denials project now. If he appeared to be telling the truth about one thing, it would appear all the more likely he was telling the truth about the rest.

Clemens shouldn't be trying to match every one of McNamee's claims tit-for-tat with contradictory explanations; he needs to convince the court of public opinion that the bulk of his success wasn't aided by banned substances. The public and the media (who matter more to Clemens at this point in regards to the Hall of Fame) seem to value honesty and humility over defensiveness and shrill claims of innocence. We're willing to give a pass to someone who admits he's fallible over someone who either seems like they're trying to get away with something, or is living in denial (witness the cold shoulder given to Mark McGwire). If you believe that Clemens never ingested anything stronger than orange juice and Flinstones vitamins, you might say that it's unfair that he should have to admit to false charges. But no one said we were playing fair anymore.