



March 12, 2008

## COLUMNISTS

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### **Bidding for Bonds' last Mile High homer**

Collusion suspected with all three bidders represented by the same PR firm

*By Mike Taylor*

Three Denver-area companies were bidding on the baseball that vilified slugger Barry Bonds hit out of Coors Field last Sept. 5. It could be the last homer Bonds will ever hit, since no team seems interested in signing the aging home-run king for the upcoming season. Hence, the ball's potential historical value.

But what was amusing is that all three companies bidding on this ball are represented by the same PR firm - Steve Caulk's ProConnect Public Relations. He and his staff have been sending out press releases announcing separate bids on the ball by GRAnderson Wealth Management Group, which in early bidding had offered \$13,000 for it; Lake Arbor Automotive and Truck (\$10,000 initially); and Alpine Waste & Recycling (\$7,170).

It took me a while to figure out that the same PR firm was trumpeting these bids by the three companies and that some collusion or at least some behind-the-scenes orchestration and perhaps even some tongue-in-cheek manipulation of the media seemed to be at work. When this did finally occur to me yesterday, I e-mailed Caulk.

"Hey, so what's the deal - are you representing both companies that are bidding on this ball?" I asked, not knowing yet that not two but THREE companies he represents were bidding for it. "Seems like regardless of who winds up with the ball, they win, publicity-wise. If that's the case, I'd like to put this on my blog as a marketing tactic. At any rate, I still think the ball should be shredded and pulverized by the Alpine Waste recycling machine."

Caulk's initial response left me still wondering about his role with the three companies and their bid for the ball. "Mike, I expect to have a statement for you shortly," he answered. Later he did confirm that he does represent all three companies but that they are aware of it and see no conflict.

The possibility of seeing the Bonds ball destroyed in a demonstration of Alpine Waste & Recycling's new crushing and pulverizing machines was what interested me in the first place. I knew of a Chicago bar a few years back buying the ball that had cost the Cubs a shot at the World Series when a fan, Steve Bartman, interfered with a Cub outfielder's attempt to catch it. The bar owner blew it up in a plexiglass chamber in a big public gathering. I also knew Alpine had a new state-of-the-art recycling center and so I jumped to the conclusion, or maybe it was just the hope, they'd acquire the home-run ball - stigmatized like all Bonds homers in recent years by allegations of steroid use - and then crush it to a pulp and return it to its rightful elements of cowhide, string and rubber nucleus.

But then it became apparent that whatever bidder ended up with the ball was merely going to put it on display - and ask the seller to donate a portion of the sale to charity.

At least that's what it seemed like until yet another press release by ProConnect on Tuesday cast further doubt on who would wind up as the ball's owner:

"GRAnderson Wealth Management Group has reason to believe that its recent offer to purchase Barry Bonds' home run ball No. 762 has prompted the unidentified owner to put the ball up for formal auction. Through his representatives, the owner of the ball has called a press conference for Thursday morning. In the interest of expediting this transaction, GRAnderson Wealth Management Group is therefore willing to increase its offer to \$15,000, if the owner will agree to suspend plans for the auction. GRAnderson will not participate in a formal auction, due to previous stipulations that a portion of the proceeds must go to charity."

But wait. Late Wednesday afternoon came yet another press release, this one saying that Lake Arbor Auto had upped its offer for the ball to \$16,000. And at the bottom of the release: "The current holder of the Bonds home run ball should contact Steve Caulk of ProConnect Public Relations, representing Lake Arbor Auto, at (303) 410-4971 to set up the exchange."

What? They don't even know where the ball is or who's got it?

A press conference was scheduled for Thursday at 10 a.m. at ESPN Zone downtown for the unnamed owner to announce his plans for the ball.

Then around 11:30 a.m. Thursday, a breaking Associated Press story by Pat Graham effectively crushed out any hope that one of the three aforementioned Denver companies would wind up with the Bonds ball - at least not unless they upped their bids exponentially:

*DENVER - An auction house says a Colorado man has decided to sell the baseball Barry Bonds hit for career homer No. 762, and it could fetch \$1 million.*

*SCP Auctions said Thursday that 24-year-old Jameson Sutton of Boulder snared Bonds' final homer of last season on Sept. 5 at Coors Field.*

*SCP said Sutton has decided to sell the ball in an online auction starting March 31. The auction house also handled the sale of Bond's record-breaking home run ball No. 756, which went for \$752,467.*

*Bonds' return to baseball looks uncertain. The Giants didn't re-sign the 43-year-old, and the home run king faces perjury and obstruction charges stemming from a steroids investigation. He pleaded not guilty.*

*If Bonds doesn't return, No. 762 would remain the major league record for career homers for the foreseeable future. Among active players, Sammy Sosa is second with 609.*

*"Baseball's all-time home run record is, arguably, the most prominent individual record in all of sports," said Dan Imler, managing director of SCP Auctions.*

*Bonds hit No. 762 over the left-field fence — the opposite field for the lefty-batting slugger — on a 99-mph fastball by Ubaldo Jimenez.*

*"I ended up being in the right place at the right time," Sutton said.*

*SCP sold Bonds' 755th — which tied Hank Aaron's mark — for \$186,750.*

*Bonds' 715th home run ball, which moved him ahead of Babe Ruth and into second place on the career list, sold for \$220,100 in a 2006 auction.*

*SCP said it authenticated Sutton's ball by studying game films and interviewing fans, including Robert Harmon, who was scrambling with Sutton for the ball.*

*SCP said Harmon signed an affidavit saying he doesn't have the ball, and that Sutton submitted to a polygraph test.*

So there you have it.

This Bonds baseball pursuit is looking more and more like a case of some people - including me - with too much time on their hands waiting for the Rockies' season opener April 5.