

Chasing Aaron tires Bonds

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Barry Bonds once seemed on an inevitable march toward becoming baseball's home run king. The San Francisco slugger homered at a dizzying rate, sending pitches both good and bad over outfield fences. Now he's lucky to hit one out once a week.

What only a few years ago appeared a relatively simple task has become daunting: 40 home runs to tie Hank Aaron's record of 755.

"If my health feels good and I feel like I can play, then I'm going to play," Bonds said Monday before the Giants played at Florida, then minutes later became a little less definitive. "If I'm healthy enough, it's a good shot. It's still a long way away. We're still in May. Anything can happen between now and then."

He's playing on a surgically repaired right knee and has bone chips floating in his left elbow. Then there are the two investigations into his alleged steroid use.

"I don't know why people think he's not going to get Aaron," Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson said. "He needs 40 home runs, so sometime in 2007, he's going to go by Henry."

"I don't know if George Mitchell will chop him with the investigation, but if he doesn't test positive, or they don't get something on him, it's just a matter of time."

Bonds took the first step in that direction Sunday, when he hit his 715th homer

to move past Babe Ruth and into second place on the career chart. He did it with a 445-foot, two-run shot to center off Byung-Hyun Kim in the fourth inning of a 6-3 loss to the Colorado Rockies.

Now, only Aaron stands ahead of him.

"Is it going to happen? I don't know. I can't predict that," Bonds said. "I can't predict what's going to happen in the future. I can't."

His five-year, \$90 million contract with the Giants expires after the season and Bonds hasn't yet said if he will quit after 21 years in the majors or try to keep playing, perhaps as a designated hitter in the American League.

"I want to see him do it if he can play," said Detroit manager Jim Leyland, who managed Bonds for seven years with the Pittsburgh Pirates before the slugger left as a free agent to join San Francisco for the 1993 season.

"I know him well enough that I don't think you'll ever see Barry play if he thinks he's going to embarrass himself. He won't stay on just to do it. I'd be shocked. He'd be too proud of a guy for that."

How long it goes with only Aaron, Bonds and Ruth in the 700 home run club is another question. Albert Pujols of St. Louis and Alex Rodriguez of the New York Yankees have realistic chances to join them if they can keep up their prodigious paces.

If anyone needed a re-

minder who's left for Bonds, it came when the Giants unfurled two banners from the light towers on either side of the main scoreboard in center field: one of Bonds on the left and the other of Aaron's 755.

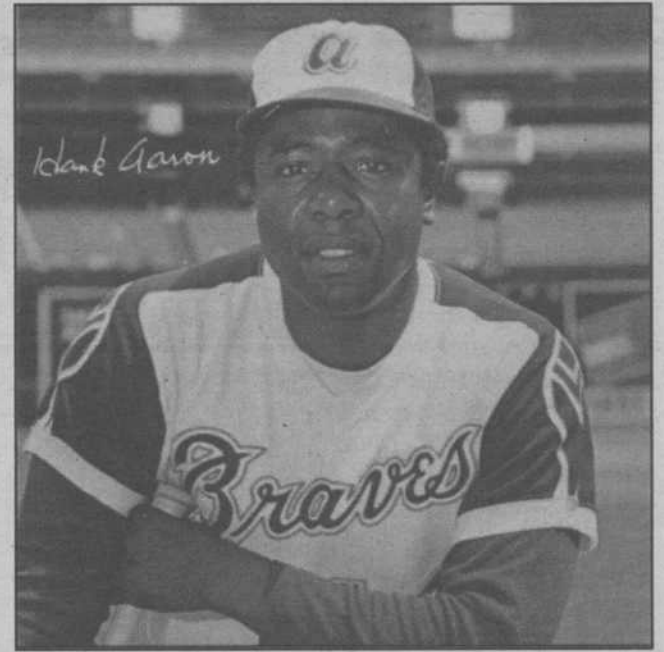
"We're glad it's over," Giants manager Felipe Alou said. "We need a lot of home runs now. People don't have to count them anymore, but we need a few to win some ballgames."

Bonds, who turns 42 on July 24, played five games between his 714th homer

May 20 at Oakland and 715. He went nine games without a homer after hitting 713 on May 7 at Philadelphia.

"I don't think I was over-trying. I just thought there was too much at me, trying to get away," he said. "In the last week or so, everything died down so it felt a lot better. Somebody else is going to come along and they'll go through all this media and stuff like that — it's just overwhelming. It really drains you."

Bonds generated even (See Bonds, Page 15)

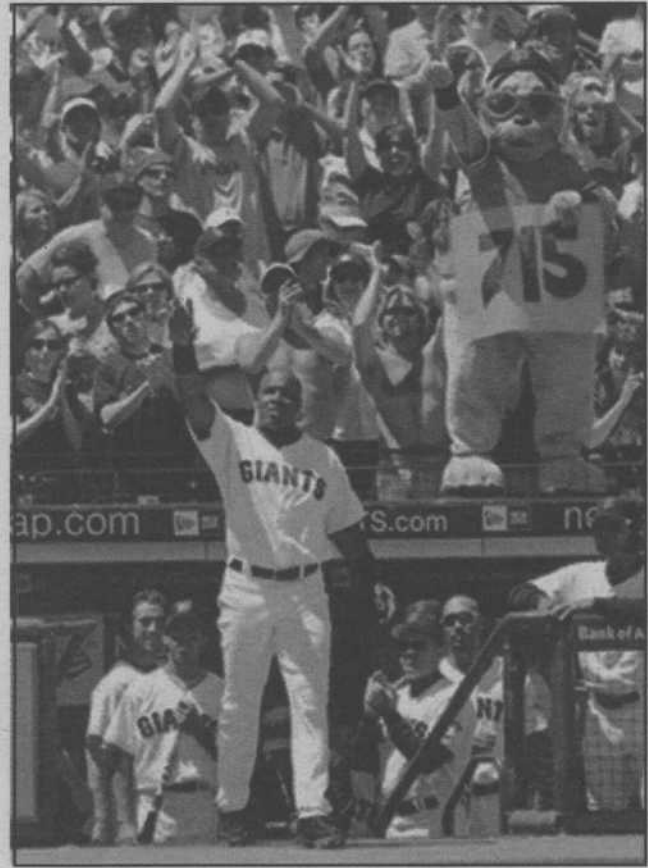


Hank Aaron hit 755 home runs, the most in baseball history.

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San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds waves to the crowd after he hit his 715th home run against the Colorado Rockies in the fourth inning in San Francisco on Sunday.

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