



Hank Aaron, left, chats with former President Bill Clinton during a celebration of Aaron's 75th birthday last week in Atlanta. The birthday drew a who's who of notable people.

Famous attend Aaron birthday

ATLANTA (AP)- Barry Bonds trudged back to court to again plead his innocence. Hank Aaron dined alongside a former president on his 75th birthday.

The contrast between the current and former home run kings couldn't have been more striking.

Bill Clinton to baseball commissioner Bud Selig, the famous came together to celebrate a landmark birthday for "Hammerin' Hank," the modest man who hit 755 homers during his Hall of Fame career.

"This means an awful lot to me," Aaron said after posing for pictures with some of his birthday guests.

"It means you tried to carry yourself in such a way that people have respect for you. That's the most important thing.

I don't try to do anything special. I just try to share whatever I've been able to accomplish with other people."

On the other side of the country, Bonds entered a San Francisco courtroom to plead not guilty to charges he lied when he told a grand jury he never knowingly took performance-enhancing drugs as he was chasing Aaron's record.

Aaron declined to discuss Bonds' legal woes, nor the perception that his record of 762 homers is tainted by allegations of drug use.

"I haven't been keeping up with it. I really haven't," Aaron said of the Bonds case. "I haven't thought about it one way or the other. Really."

Selig, a longtime friend of Aaron who watched him play when the Braves were in Milwaukee, wouldn't comment on Bonds' court case. The commissioner balked, as well, when asked whether there was any chance the baseball record book could be altered — an asterisk, per-

haps? — if the former San Francisco Giants slugger is convicted on federal perjury charges.

"Well, let's not get into hypotheticals," Selig said. "This is a night to enjoy. Let's see how that all plays out."

Clinton, who dined at Aaron's table, credited him with helping carve a path of racial tolerance that led to the election of the first African-American president, Barack Obama.

"We're a different country now," Clinton said, noting the racist letters that Aaron received while chasing Ruth's mark of 715 homers, some even threatening to kill the Black man if he broke a White hero's record. "You've given us far more than we'll ever give you," Clinton told Aaron.

The former slugger said he was thrilled with Obama's election but doesn't spend much time dwelling on the past. "I am extremely happy with what happened in the country with having a Black president," he said. "I don't think about 15, 20 years ago. I don't have time to. I think about the good time I'm having now. I've got the respect of people. That's the most important thing, trying to do everything I can and do it right."

Former Braves owner Ted Turner scoffed at questions about Bonds, but did say he considers Aaron the greatest player ever — and still the home run king. "Yes, I do," Turner said.

Tom Johnson, the retired chairman of CNN, appeared to take a swipe at Bonds while paying tribute to Aaron.

"You will always rank number one in my record book, without an asterisk," Johnson said. "Henry, you never disappointed us. Not once. Long after all of us are

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Cowboys let Pac Man Jones go

IRVING, Texas (AP) — Troubled cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones was released Monday by the Dallas Cowboys, making him a free agent.

The Cowboys said last month they planned to release Jones, and Monday was the first day teams could make waiver requests.

Jones was suspended for six games by the NFL after an alcohol-related scuffle in October with a team-provided bodyguard at a Dallas hotel.

The cornerback came to

Dallas after being suspended for the entire 2007 season following multiple off-field incidents while with the Tennessee Titans.

The Cowboys acquired him in a trade during the draft in April, and commissioner Roger Goodell cleared him to play at the end of the pre-season.

Expected to give the Cowboys a boost on defense and special teams, Jones had 31 tackles and no interceptions in his nine games (six starts). He averaged only 4.5 yards on his 21 punt returns, with

a long of 18 yards.

Before coming to Dallas, Jones was arrested six times and involved in 12 instances requiring police intervention after Tennessee drafted him in the first round in 2005.

The Cowboys traded for him anyway, despite the 2007 suspension.

But on Oct. 7, Jones got into the incident with the bodyguard and was suspended again.

Jones missed a seventh game later in the season with an injury.

The 25-year-old Jones

spent part of his time away from football taking part in an alcohol rehabilitation program.

Tennessee received a fourth-round draft pick in the April trade. The Titans were also supposed to get a sixth-rounder next year, but because Jones was suspended again, Dallas will instead receive a fifth-round pick in 2009.

A call placed to Worrick Robinson, Jones' Nashville-based attorney, was not immediately returned Monday night.

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