

The dream of the '90s is alive with Thome

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Jim Thome was trying to be quiet, because his wife was trying to sleep in the next room, but he was having a hard time containing his excitement on Thursday night. Thome was talking on the phone with Sandy Alomar Jr., and text messages were coming in from Albert Belle, Kenny Lofton and Carlos Baerga.

Since being voted into the Hall of Fame last week, Thome has been experiencing the good old days all over again. There have been countless calls and hundreds of texts. There has been a lot of remember-when storytelling and plenty of full-belly laughter following. Thursday's chats were in an effort to organize a Spring Training dinner for the former Tribe greats, and Thome was loving every second of it.

"My excitement level is through the roof," Thome said on Friday. "What this has done is bring back so many memories, because now we can talk about it and share it."

There are other players from the great Cleveland teams of the 1990s in the Hall of Fame, names like Roberto Alomar, Dave Winfield and Eddie Murray. Thome, though, is the first who will be enshrined with an Indians logo on his plaque. He is the franchise's all-time home run king (337), a member of the 600-home run club and now the 13th player to go into the Hall with the Indians as his primary team.

Thome sat down with Indians radio voice Tom Hamilton on Friday in downtown Cleveland for a lengthy discussion about being voted into the Hall, among other topics. The wide-ranging conversation in front of season-ticket holders was taped and will air at 7 p.m. ET on Feb. 9 on SportsTime Ohio.

This year's Hall of Fame class is a big one. Thome will be joined on the dais by former players Chipper Jones, Trevor Hoffman, Vladimir Guerrero, Jack Morris and Alan Trammell for the induction ceremony on July 29 in Cooperstown, N.Y. Thome will serve as the representative of the 1990s Tribe teams that went to the World Series in '95 and '97 and featured arguably one of the greatest lineups in baseball history.

Thome's teammates are thrilled that he is getting the chance to put those teams back in the spotlight.

"You know how there's a saying about good guys finish last?" Alomar said. "I'm so glad that a great, genuine person like Jim Thome is in the Hall of Fame. He was such a hard worker and a great teammate. He's the most genuine guy I've ever seen. It's good to see people like that reach their goals and the Hall of Fame. And also to have a guy from those '90s Indians to be in it. We had such great teams in that era."

Thome hopes to have Hall of Fame company from those teams, though.

He was disappointed when Lofton -- one of the great base thieves and center fielders of his era -- was bounced from the ballot in 2013 after receiving just 3.2 percent of the vote on the first try. Similarly, Thome is hoping that more voters will check Omar Vizquel's name in the future. Vizquel (an 11-time Gold Glove Award winner) was named on 37 percent of the ballots this year, which was his first year of eligibility.

"Kenny Lofton, to me, is a Hall of Famer. Omar Vizquel's a Hall of Famer," Thome said. "And you could go down the list. We all benefited from each other and I think the best part of this is the story will continue, because in my opinion, there will be more guys from our group to go in."

Until that day comes, Indians fans who make the trek to Cooperstown will have Thome as the symbol for that golden era of Cleveland baseball.

"To me, you're only as good as the people around you," Thome said. "We picked each other up all the time, motivated each other. Guys like Albert Belle, believe it or not, motivated us all to be great players. The leaders in Sandy Alomar and Carlos Baerga. The way Kenny played the game and leading off a game and setting a stage so high."

To Thome, they are all with him on this journey to Cooperstown, especially given all the stories being told and retold in the wake of the Hall of Fame voting results.

"That is truly what the game is about," Thome said.

Thome wants 'Block C' logo on HOF plaque

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Jim Thome loves and appreciates baseball history. When he first had the chance to play in Cleveland Stadium, his dad, Chuck, made sure his son knew how many great players had taken that field before him. He rattled off names like Ted Williams, Babe Ruth and Bob Feller.

"To me, it was about the tradition," Thome said of playing in Cleveland.

Now, Thome's name will be printed in bronze on a Hall of Fame plaque in Cooperstown, N.Y. The former slugger got the call on Jan. 24 that he was voted into the institution's hallowed halls by the Baseball Writers' Association of America, making Thome and Feller the only Cleveland players to be voted in on the first ballot. Thome will wear an Indians hat on his plaque and, if he has his way, it will include a Block C logo.

Speaking at a taped event for season-ticket holders on Friday in downtown Cleveland -- the discussion with Indians radio voice Tom Hamilton will air at 7 p.m. ET on Feb. 9 on SportsTime Ohio -- Thome said he feels going in with a "C" on his cap is the "right thing to do." His comments came in the wake of Monday's announcement by Major League Baseball that the Indians will no longer use the Chief Wahoo logo on the team's on-field uniforms, beginning with the 2019 season.

Thome said he will discuss the logo decision with the Hall of Fame leading up to the July 29 induction ceremony, where his plaque will be revealed.

"We're going to have some thoughtful conversation once we go there," Thome said. "I know my decision would be to wear the 'C,' because I think it's the right thing to do and I fully support the way the Indians, through this week, have done the decision that they've done. That's what I support. But, to be thoughtful, I think I need to have a conversation with the Hall of Fame, because of all the history and everything involved. I just think that's the right thing to do."

Thome is the franchise's all-time home run king with 337 shots and ended with 612 homers across 22 seasons spent with the Indians, Phillies, White Sox, Twins, Dodgers and Orioles. He will be the 13th player in the Hall of Fame to claim Cleveland as his primary team, and the first voted in by the BBWAA since 1976 (Bob Lemon). Among that group, only Early Wynn's plaque has a version of the Chief Wahoo logo.

During Thome's era with the Indians, the cartoon logo was more prevalent than the Block C that the team uses as its primary symbol today. He did wear the "C" upon his return to the club during the 2011 season.

Monday's announcement that the team would discontinue the use of the logo on its uniform came after discussions with MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred over the past two years. Cleveland will maintain a limited retail presence in Northeast Ohio and Goodyear, Ariz., for the Chief Wahoo mark in order to keep control over the trademark.

"Major League Baseball is committed to building a culture of diversity and inclusion throughout the game," Manfred said in a statement on Monday. "Over the past year, we encouraged dialogue with the Indians organization about the club's use of the Chief Wahoo logo. During our constructive conversations, [Indians owner] Paul Dolan made clear that there are fans who have a long-standing attachment to the logo and its place in the history of the team.

"Nonetheless, the club ultimately agreed with my position that the logo is no longer appropriate for on-field use in Major League Baseball and I appreciate Mr. Dolan's acknowledgement that removing it from the on-field uniform by the start of the 2019 season is the right course."

Tomlin, aiming for Tribe rotation, knows all roles

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

The Indians are heading into Spring Training with two rotation jobs up for grabs and four candidates. This week, MLB.com will examine each candidate's respective situation and chances of winning the job. Today: Josh Tomlin.

CLEVELAND -- Josh Tomlin plays the role of the wise veteran well. With his Texas drawl and calm demeanor, the sentences that roll off his tongue are beginning to sound more like proverbs than baseball cliches. Tomlin has been there, and he has done that.

Tomlin has had his back against the wall for most of his career. Other pitchers with similar stuff might have bowed out of the game by now, but here Tomlin is, marked with the distinction of being the longest-tenured player in the Cleveland organization. And yet, once again, he is heading into Spring Training with nothing guaranteed.

"Wherever you start the season," Tomlin said, "that doesn't mean it's where you're going to finish."

There he goes, quoting the Book of Tomlin again.

When camp opens for the Indians in Arizona, the competition for the final two spots in the team's rotation will be underway. It goes without saying that Tomlin brings the most experience to the table, but both Mike Clevinger and Danny Salazar have strong cases to take the jobs. Lefty Ryan Merritt is right behind that trio, waiting for a window of opportunity.

Tomlin has been in Clevinger's shoes. Back in 2011, Tomlin made 26 starts, won 12 games and looked like a rookie poised to become a rotation staple. He has been in Salazar's position. Tomlin has gone through Tommy John surgery and endured other arm troubles that jeopardized his place on the pitching staff. He certainly knows what it is like for Merritt. Tomlin was a kid from a small town in Texas, a late-round Draft pick, and he had to prove in the Minors that his heart was bigger than any radar reading.

After all that Tomlin has lived through in his career, he knows what sits atop his list of priorities.

"To win a World Series," Tomlin said.

If there are no unexpected setbacks with the rotation in the preseason, one or two of the four pitchers in question may need to move to the bullpen. Each of them have filled a relief role at some point, but to a man they each want to take the mound as a starter. Tomlin made 26 starts

for the Tribe last year, finishing strong, but then shifted to the 'pen and worked three shutout innings in the American League Division Series against the Yankees.

When winning the World Series is the focus, Tomlin views putting the team first is most important.

"Whenever your time is called to pitch, you go out and do your job," Tomlin said. "The great thing about this team is that there is depth. If one guy gets banged up or needs a break or a breather, you're always going to need that guy to come in and step up. We have those guys who are readily available. That contributes to the success you have as an organization and as a team. It takes 40 men to get the job done, not 25."

That kind of attitude is why Tomlin has become a favorite among his teammates and Indians manager Terry Francona. It is why Tomlin is among the players asked to talk to the Minor Leaguers when the organization's annual fall development program rolls around. Beyond all the advice the right-hander can offer, though, he still has shown the ability to take the mound and win.

The overall picture in 2017 was not pretty: Tomlin posted a 4.98 ERA in 141 innings and missed a chunk of the season with a left hamstring problem. That injury flared in the midst of a brilliant road start against the White Sox on July 30, when Tomlin walked off the field after four no-hit innings. Tomlin returned strong in September to help finish out the year 6-0 with a 3.11 ERA and 45 strikeouts against three walks in 55 innings across his final 10 outings, including four in July. Tomlin's 7.8 strikeout-to-walk rate also led the Majors (minimum 140 innings).

That was just more experience for Tomlin to put in his back pocket.

"You just try to build off of what you did last year," Tomlin said. "Work on the good things, and keep looking at the positives, just try to have that positive mindset going forward. Don't let that negative stuff creep into your head and make it turn into something it's actually not."

Tribe's truck sets off for Arizona, Spring Training

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The hum of Terry Francona's scooter is usually the first sign of spring around Progressive Field. Every year during the manager's tenure with the Indians, his favorite mode of transportation has made its way from the Cleveland clubhouse to the equipment trucks and then to Arizona.

This year, the two 53-foot trucks that pulled out of Cleveland and began the journey to Goodyear, Ariz., were packed with boxes, duffel bags, trunks and suitcases and filled with baseball equipment, items for the medical and training staff, merchandise, food, water, candy and more. Tito's scooter did not make the trip.

"This was the first year," Tony Amato, the Indians' home clubhouse and equipment manager, said via the team. "It takes up space in the truck. It's just hard to build around and he very rarely uses it down there."

In downtown Cleveland, Francona can usually be spotted zipping out of Progressive Field on his "hog" on his way home. At the team's Arizona complex, the scooter usually sits parked behind the building. Francona and his coaches typically use golf carts or Gators to make the half-mile trek from the training facility to Goodyear Ballpark. So, Amato texted Francona, who gave permission to leave the vehicle behind.

That helped clear a little more room on the trucks this year for the 10,368 baseballs, 144 boxes of sunflower seeds (BBQ, ranch, dill pickle, kettle roast and original flavors will all be available to the players) and the 72 tubs of Dubble Bubble gum. That is not even all the gum that will wind up in Arizona. Another shipment has been ordered.

"There's going to be quite a bit of gum," Amato said.

For fans, the trucks poking their noses out of ballparks around the country is almost like baseball's version of Groundhog Day. Even with snow still on the ground around Northeast Ohio, winter is coming to an end. Spring -- or at least Spring Training -- is nearly here.

Amato said he and his staff have already reached that point mentally.

"We've already been at it now for a while," Amato said. "This is more the professional-movers-type day to get everything. So, we've kind of been in the Spring Training mode now for at least two or three weeks."

Now, it is less than two weeks from the official start of the preseason for the Tribe.

The trucks pulled out of the stadium around 11:30 a.m. ET on Thursday and will be unpacked at the team's Goodyear complex on Tuesday morning. The lockers in the home clubhouse will be filled with uniforms and the weight room and batting cages will be stocked with equipment. Come Feb. 16, the facility will be a hive of activity for the first workout for the Tribe's pitchers and catchers.

Tito's scooter will be waiting and ready for the home opener on April 6 vs. Kansas City.

With big league stuff, Merritt eyes Tribe rotation

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Ryan Merritt has tasted the Major League dream. The left-hander answered the call at a moment's notice and performed well in important late-season moments. He has pitched in a raucous playoff environment and sipped champagne in an American League pennant celebration.

Mention those moments and Merritt -- slender in build and soft-spoken by nature -- allows himself the slightest smile. He has contributed to this talented and deep Cleveland pitching staff in spurts over the past two seasons, but it is that talent and depth that is now working against the lefty. Merritt is so close to fully realizing his big league dreams, but he's facing an uphill battle in the Tribe's upcoming spring rotation race.

"This is the ultimate goal," said Merritt, speaking inside the Indians' clubhouse at Progressive Field last month. "To pitch in the big leagues, to be the best, to win the Cy Young, to win the World Series. Being this close to having those opportunities, it's hard to explain. It gets you excited for this season and just the unknown. You don't know."

As things currently stand, Cleveland's rotation figures to include two-time AL Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, along with Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer. The competition for the two other jobs will likely come down to Clevinger, Salazar and Tomlin. Merritt is there as an insurance plan, but his situation includes a wrinkle: He is out of Minor League options.

That means that the Indians would need to expose Merritt to waivers before being able to send him to Triple-A Columbus. That would put the pitcher up for grabs for other teams that are better situated to plug him into a Major League rotation. If Merritt does not factor into Cleveland's rotation plans, he could also be moved to the bullpen. Or, a third option would be for the Indians to explore trade scenarios during the spring.

Merritt knows none of that is within his control.

"I'm just going to show up to Spring Training and try to be the best I can be," he said. "And whatever happens after that happens."

Merritt knows all too well how quickly things can change.

Two years ago, Merritt's season was over when the Indians came calling. Carrasco and Salazar were sidelined with injuries, and Bauer sustained a deep cut on his pitching hand during the 2016 postseason in his famous drone-related incident. Cleveland needed a starter for the AL Championship Series against Toronto and brought the young lefty north of the border.

When the Blue Jays learned who they would be facing, Jose Bautista quipped that Merritt would probably be "shaking in his boots" under the circumstances. Instead, the left-hander crafted 4 1/3 shutout innings in Game 5 of the ALCS, helping push the Indians into the World Series. In the wake of that win, Indians fans found the wedding registry for Merritt and his fiancée and swiftly piled up the purchases in thanks.

"That experience is hard to explain," Merritt said with a chuckle. "It makes you feel so good, how all the fans just took care of me and embraced me and just sent me so many gifts. It's a blessing."

That ALCS outing was not the only time Merritt has stepped up for the Tribe.

Merritt's first big league start came against the Royals on Sept. 30, 2016, when the Indians were still jockeying for position in the AL playoff picture. The lefty worked five strong innings, allowing only one run. Last season, the pitcher logged a 1.74 ERA in five appearances (mostly as a spot starter) for Cleveland. During the Tribe's AL-record 22-game winning streak, Merritt made two starts and won both games, giving up one run in 12 innings.

Merritt hails from a small town in Texas and was picked by Cleveland in the 16th round of the 2011 MLB Draft. He relies on precision, a knee-buckling curve and a fastball that averages 87 mph. That sounds a lot like a left-handed version of Tomlin, who is the longest-tenured player in the organization. Tomlin is also from Texas, was taken in the 19th round in the '06 Draft and has found success through control and confusion, rather than power.

Tomlin knows this is an important spring for Merritt, and he believes the lefty has what it takes to not just taste the Majors, but stay there.

"He's going to get a shot," Tomlin said. "At the end of the spring, we'll see what happens. Whatever the case may be, he's going to find his stuff in the big leagues somewhere."

Bob Dyer: Here's how to replace Chief Wahoo

Love him or hate him, Chief Wahoo is gone.

It's a done deal. The debate is over. So let's stop talking about it.

What we ought to be focusing on is this:

What's next?

The "block C," which the Cleveland Indians have featured increasingly in recent years, is a snore. It's nothing more than an ordinary capital letter. And it just as easily could represent Cincinnati or Chicago.

We need something distinctive and unique that also is acceptable to most American Indians. And the best idea I've heard for finding a logo that fits that description comes from a writer at That Paper Up North.

Although I don't make a habit of bragging about our rivals, Plain Dealer columnist Terry Pluto (who spent 22 years at the Beacon Journal before leaving in 2007) has floated an idea that I love.

He says he first floated it two decades ago, when it became obvious to him that Wahoo would not survive in the long run. But my aging brain cells didn't recall it until this week, when he interviewed team owner Paul Dolan after the news broke that Wahoo's days on the playing field will be over in 2019.

"For more than 20 years," he wrote Monday, "I have been suggesting the team hire some top artists from various Indian tribes to submit new logos. Pick several then create a contest where the fans vote for their favorite. ...

"Dolan has never been especially impressed with my idea. As usual, he smiled and sort of shrugged at my suggestion."

Dolan should take Pluto seriously.

What better way to create a logo than to bring both American Indians and Cleveland baseball fans into the process?

Obviously, not all American Indians think the same way, but the likelihood is high that something coming from a fellow Indian would be respectful and widely palatable.

And while we're at it, the name "Indians" is not, and has never been, in jeopardy, mainly because there's nothing derogatory about referring to someone as an Indian. "Indians" isn't even close to Washington's football "Redskins."

In fact, the Associated Press Stylebook says, "American Indian or Native American is acceptable for those in the U.S."

That widely used reference book goes on to say that, whenever possible, the name of the tribe should be used, as in, "He is a Navajo commissioner."

Heck, the term "Native Americans" is more controversial than "Indians." The 1986 AP Stylebook advised journalists to "avoid the use of Native American except in quotations. American Indians migrated to the continent over a land bridge from Asia."

In any event, it would be wonderful if the team would seek entries from American Indian artists, narrow down the choices and put it up to a vote of the fans.

The team wouldn't give up control because ownership would be dictating the final three or four choices. Those logos would draw national attention, and the whole process would energize the fans.

And you never know. Maybe a logo change could somehow change the Cleveland Indians' championship drought of 69 years.

Nothing else has.

Jim Thome and Cleveland should enjoy his ride to Cooperstown this summer

Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Hall of Famer John Smoltz had one piece of advice for new Hall of Famer Jim Thome: "Enjoy the ride. Enjoy every day of it."

Thome, selected on Jan. 24 as a first-ballot choice for the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, is trying to do just that. He's received over 700 congratulatory text messages from former teammates, coaches, family and friends. The other night he was talking to his former roommate Sandy Alomar, while simultaneously texting with former teammates Kenny Lofton, Albert Belle and Carlos Baerga. They were trying to set a lunch date in Arizona sometime during spring training.

The more Thome talked to his old teammates, the more excited he got. He was talking and laughing so loud he almost woke his entire family.

"My excitement level was through the roof," he said.

Thirteen players represent the Indians in the Hall of Fame. Bob Feller, the winningest pitcher in franchise history, and Thome, the franchise leader in homers, are the only ones to make it on the first ballot.

"You don't ever dream of being a Hall of Famer," said Thome, in Cleveland to film a SportsTime Ohio special on his election. "But to go into the Hall of Fame on the first ballot -- you talk about pride. You talk about sticking your chest out a little bit more. You say, 'Oh, my gosh. A first ballot HOF is about as good as it gets.'"

"But you don't do it alone. The man gets the honors. But it's so much more than just the individual being honored. I look at it over the length (of my career) as everyone played a role and we all did it together. I'm very proud."

Andrea Thome reflects on Jim Thome's career and call to the Baseball HOF

Thome played parts of 13 seasons in Cleveland. When he left as a free agent in 2002 to sign a six-year, \$85 million year deal with the Phillies, he was a marked man. Indians fans were displeased and whenever he returned to Progressive Field wearing another uniform, he was booed.

But Thome and his family only had good thoughts about Cleveland. When his mother, Joyce, died, her headstone was adorned with an etching of Progressive Field as seen from her seat behind the Indians dugout. Last month when Thome was elected to Cooperstown by the Baseball Writers Association of America, his family decorated her grave with red, white and blue bunting and flowers in Peoria, Ill.

"Her seat was under the overhang behind our dugout," said Thome. "To this day, when I come to Peoria and going to my (hunting) lodge and I need to talk to my mom, I stop there and the first thing I think of is Jacobs Field.

"My sister, my brothers, my dad, they genuinely love everything about Cleveland. For many years they always talked about their summer trips to Cleveland. The drive here. The Flats and the way we played as a team. It was a special time."

Thome, in a 22-year career, played in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Chicago and Minneapolis in addition to brief stops in Los Angeles and Baltimore. He says he's loved every city he's played in, but most of all Cleveland. When fans booed him after 2002, Thome never returned a jeer for a jeer.

"Look, fans get involved with players," said Thome. "They love players. I understand.

"The decision I made, I made it. I went to Philadelphia, I embraced it. I loved my time there. But it's not for me to comment on a fan that boos me. That's what happens in sports.

"Do I want them to boo me, no. But I also see the other side of it. Maybe some of those boos meant that may have liked you and didn't want you to go. It's not for me to leave town and bash people. I've got too many wonderful memories here."

The Indians brought Thome back to Cleveland late in the 2011 season in a deal with the Twins. In his first game, he received a standing ovation and homered.

"I had such a great time when I came back and how they cheered and gave me the Standing O," said Thome. "The organization and the fans have treated me first class."

Thome already has a statue at the entrance of Progressive Field. In July, his bust will be displayed in Cooperstown. And soon it's expected that his No.25 will be officially retired. On Aug. 3, 2014, it was unofficially retired when Jason Giambi gave No. 25 to Thome, who signed a one-day contract so he could retire as an Indian.

The induction ceremony will be on July 29. Thome, Chipper Jones, Trevor Hoffman, Vladimir Guerrero, Jack Morris and Alan Trammell will be enshrined.

Thome is the first player to enter Cooperstown as an Indian from those teams that won five straight AL Central titles from 1995-99. He hopes he will not be the last.

"Kenny Lofton, to me, is a Hall of Famer," said Thome. "Omar Vizquel is a Hall of Famer. We had Eddie Murray and Dave Winfield, who are Hall of Famers (Murray with the Orioles, Winfield with the Padres).

"The best part of this is that the story will continue. In my opinion there will be more guys from our group who go in."

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Jim Thome wants to wear Cleveland Indians 'Block-C' cap rather than Chief Wahoo when he enters Hall of Fame

Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Hall of Fame induction weekend is a few months away, but newly-elected slugger Jim Thome already knows which Cleveland Indians cap he wants to appear on his plaque in Cooperstown.

And the answer might surprise some proponents of the organization's soon-to-be-retired Chief Wahoo logo.

Speaking to media following an event Friday at Playhouse Square, Thome, who last week became the 13th player elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame representing the Indians, said that he has not yet had a conversation with Hall officials. But when he does, Thome would prefer to wear the club's Block-C logo, rather than the Chief Wahoo design.

"I know my decision would be to wear the 'C' because I think it's the right thing to do," Thome said. "I think I need to have a conversation with the Hall of Fame because of all the history and everything involved. I just think that's the right thing to do."

Earlier this week, Major League Baseball and the Indians announced that the club's Chief Wahoo logo would be retired following the 2018 season. Chief Wahoo will not appear on the team's caps and uniforms, nor on Progressive Field signage beginning in 2019.

Thome said a final decision on which cap he wears on the plaque in Cooperstown will be made after some thoughtful conversation between himself, his wife and Hall of Fame officials.

"Andrea and I are going to go and be respectful," Thome said.

Thome, who wore the Chief Wahoo logo on his uniform and/or cap in some form from 1991-2002, and again briefly in 2011, also voiced his approval of the decision to retire the design, and the way the club handled it.

"I fully support the way the Indians, through this week, have made the decision that they've made," he said. "And that's what I support."

The majority of Thome's games with the Indians were played while wearing a Chief Wahoo cap, however, he also played games wearing the Indians alternate script 'I' logo. And Thome did wear a cap with the Block-C design during his 22-game stint with the club in 2011. The Block-C appeared on the team's road blue cap and alternate home red cap that year.

Chief Wahoo does appear on the batting helmet of the Thome statue in center field at Progressive Field, dedicated in 2014.

As for which individual will present Thome for induction during Hall of Fame Weekend ceremonies in Cooperstown, Thome would not reveal any of the names on his short list, but said that the decision will also come after conversations with officials at the Hall of Fame.

"That group of people is so great, so awesome," he said. "The best part of it is how they respect the history of the game. They give you so much information, from top to bottom, to help this process go smoothly."

History is on the side of the Cleveland Indians in retiring Chief Wahoo: Kevin Gover (Opinion)

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Americans have been fascinated by and conflicted about Native Americans since the founding of this country. Each generation decides all over again what to make of this complicated history. George Armstrong Custer was a hero - until he wasn't. Andrew Jackson is not the same person today that our parents and grandparents remember. The Atlanta Braves have had a total of 29 different logos. History keeps changing because Americans keep changing it.

Consider, for instance, the decision by the Cleveland Indians this week to part ways with Chief Wahoo, a red-faced caricature of an American Indian. The announcement comes after years of debate over the contentious image as well as a slow phase-out of the offensive logo.

This is a decisive moment. Chief Wahoo is the most controversial symbol in all of sports. To be clear: The team will continue to sell merchandise featuring the Chief. And the logo won't be removed from team uniforms for another year and will undoubtedly continue to be part of the Northern Ohio landscape long after that.

I wholeheartedly commend the leadership of Major League Baseball and the Cleveland Indians for their decision. At the same time, it's important to recognize that their decision is part of a much larger story.

Americans are and have always been deeply connected to Indians. Those connections are with us starting in childhood. (Think baby blankets and sippy cups branded with team logos.) Indigenous peoples, from whose land the United States was carved, are deeply embedded not only in U.S. history but also in U.S. culture and national consciousness. Over the centuries, our feelings about Native Americans have been all over the place. Almost 242 years after the country's founding, we are still trying to make sense of a strange, complicated and powerful history.

Nowhere is this ambivalence better illustrated than with the debate over team names and mascots. The National Museum of the American Indian's new exhibition, "Americans" - which looks at the phenomenon of "Indians everywhere" - includes a photo of former Washington quarterback Robert Griffin III with a young fan. Both are full of the kind of joy that sports can bring to a city. For generations, the Washington NFL team has been a unifying force in the nation's capital - despite being the last to integrate and having a name many of us recognize as a dictionary definition of a racist slur.

Fans did not choose these names. They were chosen by team owners many decades ago. In recent years many teams, at all levels, have changed their logos and names, reflecting a more diverse and inclusive America. If a new team were forming today, no one would think it was a good idea to use the R word.

"Things are changing," sports writer Christine Brennan wrote in USA Today five years ago. (Brennan covered the Washington football team for The Washington Post from 1985 to 1987.) She was referring to her decision to stop using the racist name of Washington's NFL team. Why then? "It's the right thing to do," she wrote. "If that's not reason enough, try explaining and defending the nickname to a child. It's impossible."

The Cleveland Indians have been preparing its fans for this day for a long time. Today, they stand on the right side of history. Their decision is an important step forward, but it's only a small step. My hope is that sports fans - whether they are cheering for their high school or college team or for a professional team - will find joy in the game at the same time they consider the origin of that team name and mascot. My hope is the day will come when we don't have to explain and defend these images and names to our children and grandchildren. Only then will we all be on the right side of history.

Kevin Gover is director of the National Museum of the American Indian.

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Jim Thome doesn't want plaque in Cooperstown to feature Chief Wahoo logo

ESPN

Incoming Hall of Famer Jim Thome said Friday that he does not want to be wearing a cap with the Chief Wahoo logo on his plaque in Cooperstown.

"I know my decision would be to wear the 'C' because I think it's the right thing to do," Thome said at an event in Cleveland. "I think I need to have a conversation with the Hall of Fame because of all the history and everything involved. I just think that's the right thing to do."

The Indians said Monday they are removing the Chief Wahoo logo from their jerseys and caps starting in the 2019 season. They have been wearing a cap featuring a block-C in recent years and phasing out caps with the logo.

Thome spent 13 of his 22 seasons with the Indians but has not said which team's cap he will wear when he is inducted into Cooperstown this summer. He said he and his wife will make a final decision in consultation with Cooperstown officials.

Hall of Fame weekend will be July 27-30 in Cooperstown with the induction ceremony on July 29.