The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball players urged that Marvin Miller be put in the Hall of Fame as they spoke Monday night during a memorial for the union leader.

In an auditorium filled with Hall of Famers, dozens of retired and current players, baseball officials, agents and labor lawyers, 13 speakers praised the former baseball union head, who helped players gain free agency in the 1970s and created the path to multimillion-dollar salaries. Miller died in November at 95.

“It is a travesty he is not in the Hall of Fame,” former major league player and manager Buck Martinez said during the two-hour program.

Miller has been turned down five times by various Hall of Fame committees that considered baseball executives.

Jim Bouton, who entered the majors in 1962, was critical that Bowie Kuhn, baseball’s commissioner from 1969-84, is in the Hall but Miller has been kept out.

“All those policies were not Bowie Kuhn’s policies. In fact they were all Marvin’s policies because Marvin won every battle he had with Bowie Kuhn,” Bouton said. “I think Bowie Kuhn was 0 for 67.”

Miller is next eligible to appear on a Hall ballot this December.

Hall of Famers Dave Winfield and Joe Morgan were among those who spoke before a crowd of about 450 at New York University School of Law's Tishman Auditorium. Reggie Jackson, Keith Hernandez, Steve Garvey, Ted Sizemore and David Cone were among the approximately three dozen former players in the audience.

Major League Baseball was represented by executive vice president Rob Manfred and senior vice presidents Katy Feeney and Phyllis Merhige. Also attending were George Cohen, director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service; Toru Matsubara, executive director of Japan's players' association; and Miller's children, Susan and Peter.

Winfield, who used free agency to sign a record-breaking contract after the 1980 season, said Miller taught him life lessons he still thinks of. Winfield addressed the five active players in the audience: Andrew Bailey, Bill Bray, Craig Breslow, Adam Ottavino and Micah Owings.

"Anything you do in life, know where you've come from, where you are and where you're going, and Marvin was able to share that with us," Winfield said. "Know the history of the players' association. Know how you got to where you are today."

A former economist for the United Steelworkers Union, Miller spent 16 1/2 years as executive director of the Major League Players Association, starting in 1966.

During Miller's tenure, the average major league salary increased from $19,000 to $241,000. It was $3.2 million last year. Players remembered his soft-spokeness, how when speaking on the field during spring training he kept lowering his voice to force players to crane their necks to hear.

"Every time somebody signs one of these wonderful contracts, and there are so many of them out there, I think before they get the first check they should have to write an essay on Marvin Miller," said Rusty Staub, a big leaguer from 1963-85.

Current union head Michael Weiner hosted the tribute, which included video clips taped in 2010 of Miller reminiscing. Players spoke in order of when they made their big league debuts.

“We could have searched 100 years and wouldn’t have found a more perfect person for our situation,” said Morgan, a Hall of Fame second baseman who played in the majors from 1963-84.

Donald Fehr, who served as Miller’s general counsel from 1977-82 and then headed the union from 1983-09, said he could read Miller’s mood by what drink he ordered at lunch: a Tom Collins signaled a happy mood, a martini meant he was perplexed and Old Grand-Dad Bourbon was a sign of problems.

“The reason I think he is remembered as he is, is that the baseball players’ association became a symbol, it became a symbol of what a union could be if it was run right,” said Fehr, current head of the NHL players’ union.

Martinez talked about a telephone call he received from former Oakland Athletics owner Charlie Finley during the 1985 labor negotiations.

“You tell Marvin to stick by his guns,” Martinez recalled Finley saying. “You guys are doing the right thing.”

__PUBLIC__