



1987 Cubs teammate Lee Smith (left) joined Andre Dawson in a signing at Mike's Sports N More in Lombard. Smith and Dawson posed with a certain 2000 book by a certain author about past Cubs ownership and management, and how they affected the pair as players.

New Year's Resolution: Dawson happily back in Cubs' fold?

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If conversations proceed as positively as they have in recent weeks, all the Cubs slip-ups and errors involving Hall of Famer Andre Dawson dating back to 1992 will be wiped away.

The dignified five-tool outfielder who signed a blank free-agent contract in 1987 just to play in Wrigley Field could rejoin the Cubs as a team ambassador after New Year's. Now a free agent again after the cost-slashing Miami Marlins dumped him as a special assistant, Dawson and the Cubs really want each other's company. They'll get it if they can talk it out further in coming weeks.

The two parties missed connections earlier in the year on awarding Dawson an alumni 2016 World Series ring while less-pedigreed former Cubs such as Steve Trout, Scott Sanderson and Bob Dernier were given the rare jewelry. A Chicago Baseball Museum web-site story detailed the oversight, which turned out to be a mixup in communications. Reading the CBM story, Dawson's Florida-based agent

contacted the Cubs, the non-connection was corrected and Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts finally gave him his ring at the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in October.

And if Dawson reaches back 25 years, his departure from the Cubs after six memorable seasons, including the 1987 NL Most Valuable Player award for his 49-homer, 137-RBI season, turned out to be far meaner and petty than it had to be. Dawson had grown to love the Cubs and their fans so much he wanted to retire a Cub. Instead, the team lost both Dawson and ace of aces Greg Maddux in one fell swoop as 1992 concluded.

“I’m very happy. I’m excited. It’s something I would never, ever try to make anything out of it,” Dawson said of finally getting the alumni ring that fellow Hall of Famers Fergie Jenkins, Billy Williams and Ryne Sandberg had received.

The Cubs’ initial explanation was that the awarding of rings was dependent on active involvement as alumni, such as Cubs Convention appearances, and number of years of Cubs service. To be sure, Dawson was not an annual convention attendee, but had more years as a Cub than Dernier and Trout, and as many as Sanderson. The bottom line was, a Hall of Famer is a Hall of Famer.

Dawson’s decision to come to Chicago in ‘87 without any financial assurances pushes him to the front of the line. So was his strong desire to be portrayed wearing a Cubs hat in Cooperstown, one that was thwarted by the Hall of Fame’s insistence Dawson be shown wearing a Montreal Expos’ cap. The Hall of Fame erred badly on that decision, so inductees who had strong identifications with multiple teams were given the option of being shown without a team logo on the cap in subsequent years. Maddux and Tony La Russa opted for that choice in 2014.

“For me, I’ve always felt Chicago is where I belong,” Dawson said, taking a break from signing autographs at Mike’s Sports N More in Lombard. “I’m happy and excited now that I can look in the mirror, and it can end the way I hoped it would end, maybe back in the Cubs organization.”

Dawson previously talked to Ricketts

The ongoing talks are for a role as a Cubs ambassador, duties as yet unspecified. Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts is not unfamiliar with Dawson’s leanings. Ricketts threw a party for Dawson in Cooperstown for his 2010 induction, then staged a ceremony at Wrigley Field to honor the newest enshrinee. Ricketts and sister Laura waited for Dawson as he walked through the right-field wagon gates all the way to home plate.

Several years later, Dawson told Ricketts of his desire to work for the Cubs again. He also had informed this writer of such a goal. Derek Jeter’s mass dumping of everyone from 59-homer producer Giancarlo Stanton to probably the batboy, with Dawson and fellow Hall of Famer Tony Perez in between, made Dawson free and clear to pursue a re-affiliation in Chicago.



Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts (right) is in ongoing talks with Andre Dawson about his return to the Cubs. Ricketts attended a 75th birthday party for Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins (left), who was joined by former Cubs teammates Randy Hundley (center) and Rich Nye (next to Ricketts).

“I’ve sat down and I’ve spoken to Tom Ricketts,” Dawson said. “Nothing’s official yet. Both sides are real excited about the opportunity for me to come back and re-join the organization. It’s in the process of being finalized. Tom will reach back out to me with some ideas to look over, and give him the OK. I’m anticipating around the first of the year.”

On such a schedule, the Cubs can triumphantly announce Dawson’s comeback at the Cubs Convention Jan. 11 and 12.

Just the mere word Ricketts and Dawson talked a few weeks back lit up the internet. Dawson doesn’t know how that report got out. But that is a lot of fans’ longtime wishful thinking of such a reunion.

“It was exciting to see a lot of the reviews coming across the internet,” he said. “I’ve spent a lot of time in the Chicago area this past year. I’ve been back and forth from the city (to hometown Miami) between a dozen and 18 times. I’m here a lot anyway.

“I’ve hoped for, for many times, even though back home was convenient. I don’t expect them to come knocking on my door or ringing my telephone because I’m already in a situation (a Marlins employee). But I would go as far as to say I’d make that known at some point this is how it all would end (retire as a Cub).”

Former MVP did not suit Himes well

Dawson was cut off at the pass, four years away from that desire, by then-general manager Larry Himes – all over a suit of clothes – in ‘92.

A stickler for outside appearances, discipline and diet, Himes imposed dress-code rules for traveling when he took over from Jim Frey. Players would have to be garbed in sport coat or suit – and tie – while boarding team planes and buses. Dawson was in agreement in looking professional to the public. He probably could out-dress any teammate.

However, Dawson had a stylemaster side. He obtained some \$1,800 suits from his Montreal clothier that were designed not to be worn with a tie. Instead, the suits would be matched with a turtleneck-type shirt. Himes insisted on a tie. Through the rest of the season, in which players quickly became disenchanted with Himes' strict rules, the GM gave Dawson the cold shoulder whenever their paths crossed. Himes would not even say hello, puzzling Dawson. He got his final answer after the season, when he was let go as a free agent. Dawson finished out his 20-year career, played amid 10 knee surgeries, with two years on the Boston Red Sox and two more on the Marlins.

Bringing Dawson back in a multi-varied role would be the ultimate make-good move by Ricketts.

Playing baseball the right way

Special player instruction at both the big-league and minor-league levels were part of his Marlins duties. The Cubs could benefit from a similar arrangement. As a generations-long stickler for doing things right, Dawson also could be a perfect "attitude coach."

"I anticipate that probably being a part of it," Dawson said. "I don't pat myself on the back, but I put everything I can into it to try to get the best effort. My main objective is to represent this organization to the best of my ability and do what I do as best as I can."

Focusing players on success is a personal motivation for Dawson. Back in 1990, he said he'd never manage because players – even then – did not have the same dedication his generation possessed coming up 15 years previously.

"The pleasure I get out of it is seeing them attain information and direction, and grow as a result of it," he said. "A lot of instances, they hear you, but don't *hear* you. A lot of instances, it's who you are. You develop a relationship and they trust what you're trying to do. The greatest gratification is they learn and know how to make the adjustment at this level.

"There's no nonsense about me when you're out on the field. You're blessed with an ability, so you've got to figure out how to get the best of that. You can't go through the motions. You have to look at yourself in the mirror and know you're giving it your best effort."

Being cut from the Marlins did not mean he'd be twiddling his thumbs. Dawson has for nine years operated a family business just south of his Miami home. Wife Vanessa and two uncles run the business aspects of the 22-person Paradise Funeral Home.

Obviously, the business of handling the departed will continue in good hands if one of the bosses is busy arriving again at Wrigley Field.



Former Cubs GM Larry Himes at Frank Thomas' Hall of Fame induction in 2014. Himes got into a snit over Andre Dawson's style of dress on team transportation.