

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Hall of Fame replay: Dawson in Cubs cap?

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Sometimes radical change takes place in baseball when it's least expected.

Two years ago, I seemed to wage a lonely quest to have extensive video replay introduced after a series of egregious blown calls and the presence of HD cameras. You might find a guy like Bob Brenly agreeing with you and going even further, advocating electronic calls of balls and strikes.

But no one in power – and seemingly a majority of players polled – supported more than a token replay presence. Now, after post-season embarrassments had fans talking about the umpiring in-

stead of the action, replay is a daily part of the game with umpires and managers cooperating like never before.

So in this spirit of the world turning, perhaps we can have a reversal in the Hall of Fame's 2010 call of a Montreal Expos hat adorning Andre Dawson's image on his Cooperstown plaque.

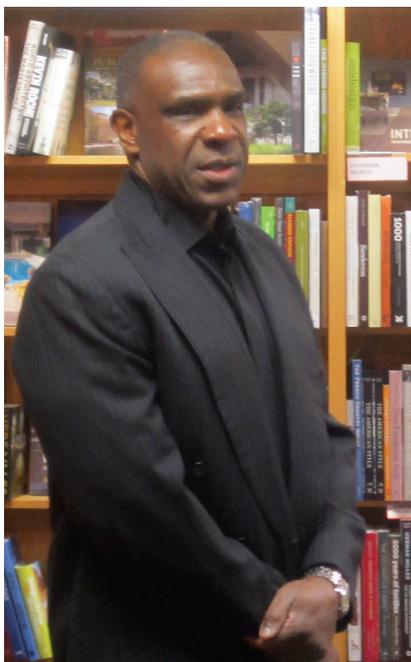
Long before he was inducted, Dawson cast his everlasting loyalty to Wrigley Field and Cubs fans for framing his career, even saving it. Although he spent the first 10 seasons in Montreal, his six years as a Cub – starting with his unparalleled 49-homer MVP season in 1987 – were an emotional lifetime to the Hawk.

Wanted Cubs cap for the fans

“I wanted to choose Chicago because without Chicago, I'm not in the Hall of Fame,” Dawson said. “It extended my playing career another 10 years. Playing on a natural playing surface (compared to the harsh artificial turf of Olympic Stadium) surely made the difference in my having longevity.



George Castle



Andre Dawson, a lifelong team player, has come to accept the fact he's depicted as a Montreal Expo on his plaque.

“I wasn’t considering a Cubs cap for just the organization. It was more or less for the fans. They really, really were inspiring day in and day out. It was a pleasure to play for them.”

Not that Dawson is still actively campaigning for a Cubs cap depiction. While exercising his First Amendment rights, he’s also always been a team player. Now he’s on the Hall’s team.

“I’m beyond that now,” he said. “Everyone knows why I wanted to go in as a Cub. Again, I’m beyond that now.”

“The most important thing was to get in, beyond everything else. Get into that fraternity and being looked at in regard to the Hall of Fame.”

We’ll do some respectful agitating for Dawson at the Chicago Baseball Museum. The timing is right. Greg Maddux, Dawson’s Cubs teammate from 1987-92, and Tony La Russa were given the option of not wearing a specific cap for their inductions this year. So if Maddux and La Russa had the choice, why wasn’t Dawson afforded the same option just four years ago?

“It was something that when I first learned of the decision, I was really disappointed because I wish I would have been extended those same circumstances,” Dawson said of the more recent flexibility. Hall president Jeff Idelson said the new policy giving a choice on cap logos actually was developed in 2013, but wasn’t applied immediately because no living personalities were inducted last year.

We’ll give the floor to Idelson to explain policy, past and present, at length.

“There had been a long-standing policy – 30 or 40 years, at least as far back as I can tell – from the museum’s standpoint it was very important there’d be some form of a logo on the cap,” he said. “Even though all the teams the player played for are listed. You can argue successfully for every day that if it weren’t for the entire (body) of his career, they wouldn’t be here. Every team contributes.”



The fact Tony La Russa (left) and Greg Maddux (right) had the privilege of choosing not to be depicted with a specific team logo draws attention to the inability of Andre Dawson to have a similar choice four years ago.

“As to which logo gets picked, it’s historically been where the player has spent the dominant portion of his career. In the case of Andre, when he went into the Hall of Fame, it was clearly a case when it was looked at by senior staff and general circles that, with no disrespect to the Cubs, with whom he was incredible – he was more so dominant in

Montreal. From our standards, by a large margin. And it was for those reasons the Expos logo was used.”

Expos numbers support Hall’s policy

Raw numbers back the Hall of Fame’s stance.

In Montreal from 1976 to 1986, the Hawk played in 1,443 games. He slugged 223 homers of his 1,575 hits, producing 838 RBIs and a .280 average. Before his knees were worn down by the ravages of multiple surgeries and the bad turf, he stole 253 bases.

As a Cub from 1987 to 1992, Dawson played in 867 games. He belted 174 homers out of his 929 hits, producing 587 RBIs and a .285 average. He stole 57 bases.

“It made great sense that an Expos logo mattered,” Idelson said. “He won most of his Gold Gloves when he was there, most of his Silver Sluggers when he was there. He not only accumulated (numbers) in Montreal, but he dominated. What can’t be lost sight of is when a guy goes into the Hall of Fame, he’s representing all the teams for whom he played.”

Ty Cobb’s time with the Philadelphia Athletics and Hank Greenberg’s with the Pittsburgh Pirates were cited by Idelson as examples of Hall of Famers who did not wear hats representing these teams for which they played late in their careers. Another aspect is the prism of history decades down the line. Long into the future, what will be the proper perspective of how the enshrinee amassed his portfolio?

But there’s another aspect of history -- the emotional context – that should be factored in. During the collusion era in which the guilty owners were eventually pinned to the tail of the donkey by legal rulings, Dawson offered to accept a blank contract to sign with the Cubs. He was tendered a \$200,000 pay cut to stay with the Expos.

When Dawson played his first game back in Olympic Stadium after signing for a \$500,000 base salary with the Cubs in '87, he was roundly booed. The fans, he reasoned, simply did not understand the circumstances that forced him to take the actions he did. A generation later, Dawson’s induction as an Expo has not exactly generated welcome-home trips to Montreal. Dawson said he has been back to the beautiful Quebec city just once since his induction.

Canada's second largest metropolis certainly was not brimming with baseball interest during and after the Dawson induction. The Expos were the biggest casualty of the 1994 strike. Like the White Sox, their best foot forward via a strong '94 World Series-



Hall of Fame president Jeff Idelson said the the context of history gets the edge over a player's preference when the depiction of a cap logo is considered.

ready team was thwarted by the interrupted season. The team never got it back together and fan interest waned in the mausoleum-like indoor Olympic Stadium. Corporations fleeing Montreal for Toronto to get away from the Quebec separatist issue further eroded the Expos' financial base. Dawson's cap is one of the few permanent reminders of what is now a ghost team, relocated to Washington, D.C. in 2005 and reborn as the now-contending Nationals.

In the end, an inductee's strong personal preference should tip the balance. But in 2010, the service of history trumped Dawson's Cubbie-blue allegiance.

"We never really sat down and discussed my feelings, what direction I wanted to go," he said. "I thought my choice would be given a lot of consideration. My preference would be given some consideration."

Yogi Berra lacks cap logo

The floor is given back to Idelson on the policy about cap logos.

"The policy has forever evolved," he said. "If you look at the entirety of the plaque gallery, more than 30 percent of them don't contain logos. Yogi Berra doesn't have a logo on his hat. Logos have only become relevant in people's minds because they've become so prevalent in our society. It's hard to walk down any street in America without seeing a logo.

"You think of a player or someone in the Hall of Fame as a Hall of Famer. You don't necessarily think of them with one team."

Given the sum total of the storylines here, a good compromise would be a plaque featuring Dawson's fondest wish. If extensive replay can be instituted, then a rewind to the Hall's 2010 decision also should be in order.

"Plaques are only changed when there's a factual mistake," Idelson said of Hall policy.

Dawson is not holding his breath.

"I don't think that will happen for one," he said. "The past is what it is. Just because they changed the rules now, they're not going to contemplate re-visiting that. It is what it is. It is the history now. I'm in as an Expo."

Dawson certainly is a favorite living Hall of Famer among the institution's management. He's the first man Idelson called when seeking an enshrinee to accompany him in giving President Obama a tour of the Hall of Fame last spring. That was an honor Dawson did not take lightly.

The only action that would top that would be a change in the depiction on the plaque. The concept of unexpected change, through all those game stoppages for replays, gives hope that someone, at some point, will do the right thing for the Hawk.