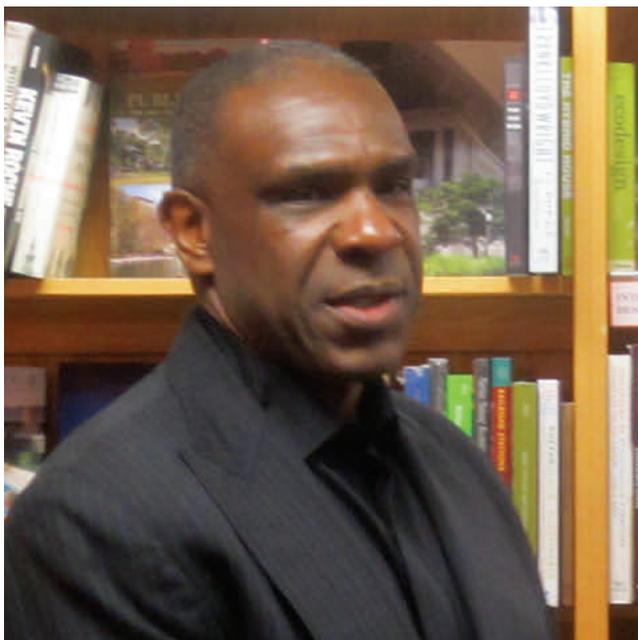


BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Lesser lights get Cubs rings while Dawson is ignored

By George Castle, CBM Historian
Posted Wednesday, April 26, 2017



While good, but not great, ex-Cubs got alumni rings, Hall of Famer Andre Dawson has not heard from the team about similar bling.

During the Cubs' championship rally in Grant Park, team leader Anthony Rizzo said all ex-Cubs had a hand in the title and celebration.

Of all former players who fit that bill, Andre Dawson has to be in the Top 10, if not Top Five. The Hawk signed a blank contract to play for the Cubs in 1987, won the Most Valuable Player Award, came back early from knee surgery to shepherd young fellow outfielders in 1989 and credits his six years in Wrigley Field for his entrée into the Hall of Fame. Dawson wanted to be bronzed in a Cubs cap at his Cooperstown induction in 2010, but the Hall of Fame instead imposed a Montreal Expos hat on his image.

Dawson's story displays loyalty to the Cubs and their fans few players in history can match.

Somehow, after all of that, and a ceremony at home plate involving Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts weeks after Dawson's induction 6 ½ years ago, the Cubs have not yet informed Dawson he'll will get an alumni World Series ring.

That silence from 1060 W. Addison is deafening.

While Dawson was in town (but not at the ballpark) during the last homestand, the Cubs awarded alumni rings to Randy Hundley, Glenn Beckert, Jose Cardenal, Jody Davis, Steve Trout and Scott Sanderson. Most of these chaps were corralled to sing in the seventh inning from a suite as they celebrated their new jewelry. There were some All-Star appearances and .342 seasons among this group, but none had the stature or the accomplishments of Dawson. And none were asked by the Hall of Fame to escort then-President Barack Obama, as Dawson was, on a tour of the Cooperstown exhibits three years ago.

Also receiving a ring was Lee Arthur Smith, another great Hall of Fame-worthy former Cub, and for one year a Dawson teammate. Smith's new bling disproves a quick theory that Dawson's longtime employment as a special assistant with the Miami Marlins scotched being awarded a Cubs ring. Smith has worked for nearly two decades as the San Francisco Giants' roving minor-league pitching instructor. He threw out the first pitch in San Francisco at an NLDS game against the Cubs in October, professing his loyalty to the team that signs his paycheck when asked about split affections that night.

The Cubs ordered 1,908 rings of different levels. Ushers and other part-time employees received rings. The Ricketts family proved its generosity with the distribution. But the Dawson oversight makes no sense.

We have sent two e-mails to Cubs corporate spokesman Julian Green. Finally responding to the second one asking why Dawson has not been informed about a ring, Green said:

"The team considered number of years spent with the team during both a player's on-field career, as well as their active post-career involvement, including number of (Cubs) conventions attended when awarding alumni rings."



Tom Ricketts watched Andre Dawson's prime years from the bleachers, and later honored him for gaining the Hall of Fame in Aug. 2010. But somehow Dawson has been an oversight in being awarded a ring. Photo credit [Zlaxfish Photography](#).

That logic sounded similar to the Hall of Fame splitting hairs on the cap, deciding Dawson's Expos tenure outweighed his eventful Cubs years. Only on number of Cubs Conventions attended could Dawson fall short in any meritocracy, and that should only be a very secondary factor into the team's decision. Years of Cubs service? Dawson's six seasons matches Sanderson and Cardenal, and is one less than Smith. The main, and overwhelming, measurement should be on-field production. Dawson blows away every other non-Hall of Fame ring recipient.

Dawson's career best was witnessed by the four Ricketts siblings. They fell in love with the Cubs in the 1980s by watching from the then-cheap (\$4 and \$5) seats in the right-field bleachers during college after emigrating from hometown Omaha. Tom and brother Pete Ricketts shared an apartment across Sheffield Avenue. Tom met wife Cecilia in the bleachers.

The family members were surely part of "Andre's Army" when he slugged 49 homers, drove in 137 runs and batted .287, booking the 1987 MVP award, to earn every penny of bonus money in that original blank contract (filled in by the late Dallas Green for a \$500,000 base). For several years prior to that bizarre deal prompted by owners' collusion, bleachers fans urged Expos' right

fielder Dawson to come over to the Cubs when he attained free agency. As if to accentuate his interest, Dawson slugged three homers – including two in a 12-run fifth inning - in a 17-15 Expos victory on Sept. 24, 1985, at Wrigley Field.

The entire right-field bleachers often “salaamed” – an exotic term for bowing down – after Dawson returned to his defensive position following another offensive burst. Surely, that was one of the compelling images that reverberated through the decades to prompt the Ricketts family purchase of the Cubs in 2009.

Dawson is still hyper-popular among grateful Cubs fans. In 2012, he packed Winnetka’s Book Stall bookstore, 1 ½ suburbs up from Tom and Todd Ricketts’ homes, when he released his biography. The line was out the door.

Mistakes can be made when so many rings and so many recipients are factored in. Dawson is frequently back visiting in Chicago, his second favorite city after hometown Miami. It’s not a case of “out of sight, out of mind.” Definitely not “out of mind” with the chairman and board members of the world champions.

Time for the big boss to make a correction.